


WILD OATS



By MRS GEORGIE SHELDON



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OR
RISING TO HONOR

By MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

AUTHOR OF

“The Golden Key,” “The Magic Cameo,”

“Little Miss Whirlwind,” “Queen Bess,”

“A Thorn Among Roses,” etc.



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WILD OATS.

WILD OATS; OR, RISING TO HONOR.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES A COUPLE OF STREET GAMINS.

"Git out there! Blast yer! I tell yer to git out—d'yer hear?"

"I won't get out. I have just as much right here as you have, Bill Bunting, and you need not think that I am afraid of a bully like you."

"Bully! eh? So I am a bully, am I?"

"Yes, you are."

"Ye little fool! I can smash every bone in yer body an' I'll do it, too, 'f ye don't look out. D'ye know who yer talkin' to? Take it back! take it back, quick! or I'll——"

"I won't take it back."

"Ye don't dare to say it agen——"

"Yes, I do, too; you are a great, selfish, cowardly bully and everybody knows it. You are bound that you'll uncheck every horse that comes to this fountain, and get all the nickels; you don't give anybody else a chance, and it's downright mean. But I'm not afraid of you, if the others are, and I'm going to make for the next horse that comes."

The above spirited conversation had been carried on by two boys—one an overgrown, slouching, untidy-looking fellow of perhaps fourteen years, with coarse, brutal, and sensual features; the other a bright, black-eyed, rosy-cheeked lad of twelve, clad in clean and whole, though much patched garments, with a strangely refined face, for a street gamin, and a keen, alert bearing which prepossessed one greatly in his favor.

They were standing, with four or five other boys of like character, by the great drinking fountain in the square where two streets, forming an acute angle, led into the busy city of Boston.

It was Sunday afternoon, a cool, cloudless, delicious day in June, and these boys were lounging around the basin waiting for chances to uncheck horses, as they were driven up to it to get a refreshing draught before going on into the delightful suburbs, or back into the city, as the case might be.

The bully had thus far claimed every horse, and the smaller boys, standing somewhat in fear of him, had meekly borne his overbearing selfishness rather than run the risk of a pounding, until, in sheer desperation, the lad mentioned had faced him, denouncing his meanness just as a handsome barouche, drawn by a fine pair of gray horses, came rolling up Beacon street toward the fountain.

The younger boy had made a dive for the carriage, and this had called forth the displeasure of Bill Bunting, who angrily ordered him to "git out."

The driver stopped his horses a few steps from the basin to allow them to rest a moment and get breath

before drinking, thus giving the occupants of the carriage an opportunity to overhear the controversy just related.

The bully was all bluster, rolled up his cuffs—if the ragged ends of his shabby sleeve could be termed such—and approaching his opponent with a ferocious and belligerent air, vowing that he would “thrash him if he did not clear out.”

“Indeed, I will not,” stoutly affirmed the little fellow, as he resolutely turned toward the carriage.

Bill saw that he was off his guard, and springing forward, dealt him a cowardly blow that nearly threw him to the ground.

“Take that, you little saucy cur,” he cried, then bounding to the side of the barouche, he doffed his cap to the driver, and asked, in a respectful tone:

“Have yer ’osses unchecked, mister?”

The man would have allowed him to perform the service, but the gentleman within the carriage, having observed the boy’s cowardly attack upon one younger and smaller than himself, interposed, in a stern tone:

“No, you young rascal, make yourself scarce, or I’ll hand you over to the police for assault and battery.”

Quailing beneath the man’s severe words and indignant glance, the boy slunk away, but muttering angrily as he went, while the other, now seeing the prospect of making a nickel, darted forward, brushing the dust from his clothes, and cried out, eagerly:

“Please, sir, may I uncheck the horses? I haven’t had a chance to-day.”

“Yes, my lad, go ahead,” returned the gentleman

with a kind smile, for the boy's bright eyes and intelligent face had touched a tender spot in his heart, for less than a year ago, he had laid his only son—his first-born, and a black-eyed rosy-cheeked boy, too—to rest in a stately tomb in Forest Hill Cemetery.

"He is a fine, plucky little fellow," he remarked to the lady by his side, as the lad sprang to the horses' heads and quickly unhooked the checks, softly patting the glossy neck of the one nearest him as he plunged his nostrils deep into the basin and drank greedily of the cool, refreshing water.

Seated opposite him was another lady and a beautiful little girl of perhaps ten years, and, between them the puggiest of pugs, wearing on his neck a bright blue ribbon, to which was attached three tiny silver bells that tinkled with his every motion. On the center one the name "Budge" was engraven; on the others the street and number of his residence.

He appeared to be very fond of his little mistress, for, every now and then, he would rise up on his hind legs, put his paws on her shoulder, and try to kiss her rosy face.

"What a shame it was for that big boy to treat the little one so," the child remarked, as her great blue eyes followed, with a sympathetic glance, the movements of the lad, while the indignant color flushed her round cheeks.

The gentleman laughed out with some amusement at this observation.

"My pet always espouses the cause of the 'under dog

in the fight,' " he said, as he reached forward and playfully pinched the little pink ear nearest him.

"Papa! you shouldn't speak of a nice boy like that as a dog. What if he should hear you?" returned the little lady, in a low tone of grave but emphatic rebuke.

"Your pardon, dear, and his, too," the gentleman smilingly responded; "I meant no disrespect to our youthful hero; I only indulged in a suggestive simile. So you think him 'a nice boy.' What has prepossessed you so in his favor?" he concluded roguishly.

"Well, he has such beautiful great black eyes—and I always liked black eyes, you know; then his face is clean and his hair was nicely brushed before that naughty boy pushed him down. He took off his hat so politely to you, too, and—and then he grew red and smiled at me."

A ripple of amused but well-bred laughter greeted this last reason for the little lady's championship, at which Mr. Budge gave a sharp bark of disapproval, for his pugship was extremely sensitive to ridicule, whether it was pointed at himself or his young mistress.

The horses had finished drinking by this time, and, after checking up their heads, the small boy again doffed his hat to the party in the carriage and stood modestly awaiting the customary nickel for his service.

The gentleman beckoned him to come forward, and the boy sprang nimbly to the side of the carriage, bestowing a shy but admiring glance upon the little girl and her full-blooded pug as he did so.

"What is your name, my lad?" the gentleman asked,

in a kindly tone, as he scanned the fine, frank face of the child.

"Ned, sir."

"Ned, eh? Ned what?"

"Ned Wallingford."

The man started and changed color slightly at the sound of the latter name, while he searched the boy's countenance more earnestly than before, a troubled look in his eye. After a moment of hesitation he drew a piece of silver from his pocket and quietly dropped it into the boy's hand.

Ned looked at the money, flushed, glanced wistfully from it to the gentleman's face, then stammered:

"It's—it's only a nickel, sir, for checking the horses and—and I haven't any change."

"That is all right; I don't wish any change," was the kindly response.

"But—but—a quarter's too much, sir," faltered the boy, now crimson to his brow.

"Not for a plucky youngster who takes hard knocks as bravely as you did a while ago," smilingly returned his patron. "Keep the money, my boy, and welcome."

"Thank you, sir," said Ned, heartily, and with gleaming eyes, while he revealed two rows of nice white teeth in an attractive smile, as he again doffed his hat.

Then as Budge walked across his little mistress' lap, laid his paws on the side of the carriage nearest Ned, wagging as gracious an approval as his tightly curled tail would admit of Ned ventured to pat his silky head, and said, softly:

"You're a nice doggy."

"Do you like pugs?" Miss Pet gravely inquired.

She had been a deeply interested witness of her father's interview with her young hero, and had not once taken her earnest eyes from his face.

"Don't I?" Ned responded, enthusiastically, "real thoroughbreds, and this is a full-blood, I am sure."

"Of course he is," the little lady asserted, with some dignity; "but how do you know?" she concluded, with some curiosity.

"I saw him gape a minute ago, and the roof of his mouth is as black as my shoe. He's got an extra toe, too, and the shortest nose I ever saw," Ned returned, confident of his own judgment.

Budge's mistress smiled benignly as the boy mentioned these marks characteristic in her pet.

"His name is Budget, and we call him Budge for short," she vouchsafed. "My nice, clever, old Budge," she added affectionately, as she patted the dog's silky head, whereupon the intelligent pug gave her two or three affectionate kisses. Then, as her father signaled the driver to go on, she detached a beautiful bud from the bunch of roses she carried in one hand, and held it out to Ned.

"Do you like flowers, too?" she asked, with charming naivete.

"You bet!" he cried, flushing to his brow, as he eagerly clutched it. "Thank you—it's a beauty."

The occupants of the carriage were sure they saw tears in his eyes, as, again touching his hat, he darted away, as if ashamed to have them see how deeply moved

he was by this pretty little act on the part of this petted child of fortune.

The vehicle moved on, taking the road which leads out to the beautiful suburban town of Brookline, and Ned never expected to see it or its occupants again.

He stood in the shadow of the fountain and watched it as long as it was in sight, a wistful expression in his young eyes, strange thoughts and emotions stirring his boyish heart, while, clutched tightly in one brown hand, was the bright silver quarter and in the other the fragrant crimson bud which the beautiful child had given him.

"It's kind of queer," he murmured, regarding the rosebud tenderly, "some folks can ride in a carriage behind a pair of high-steppers, wear fine clothes, and di'monds"—Ned had not been unobservant of the costly jewels which the ladies wore—"have flowers and pug-dogs, and no end of nice things, when poor fellows, like me, can't get all we want to eat, and have to wear ragged shoes and patched jackets and trousers. She's got a father, too!" poor Ned had never known a father. "I wonder if she's got any brothers! Wish I was her brother—I just—hanker after a pretty girl like that, to—to love."

But Ned, having reached this point in his meditations, blushed as red as the rose in his hand for having allowed himself to get so "soft," while, too, he became conscious that his companions were approaching him with the evident intention of quizzing him regarding his recent interview with his high-toned patrons.

"I say, Ned, how much did the money-bags give yer?" shouted one ragged urchin, curiously.

"What do you suppose?" indifferently responded our hero, as he thrust his precious quarter into the depths of his pocket, well knowing that, if his companion suspected that he had received such a munificent donation, they would give him no rest until he shared it with them, and he had resolved to buy his mother a quarter of a pound of nice tea with his money, for she had been obliged to go without her favorite beverage for more than a week in order to buy bread for herself and him.

"A nickel—a dime! Did he give as much as a dime, Ned?" the boys questioned, eagerly.

Ned nodded, thankful that the query had been couched in this form, and he could thus evade naming the exact amount.

The urchins were apparently satisfied with his answer, although they cast envious glances at the rose in his hand; but Ned was a favorite with his comrades, for he was never mean and selfish with them, always being willing that they should take their turn at earning a nickel at the fountain.

But, just at this moment, Bill Bunting again put in an appearance from behind an adjacent building, around which he had slunk when the gentleman in the carriage had threatened him with the police.

There was a vicious look in his eye and a threatening swagger in his gait, as he approached the circle of which Ned was the centre, which plainly betokened mischief.

"Hi, there!" he cried, in a taunting tone, "so the little fairy princess gave him a rosebud, did she? I say, youngster, give a feller a sniff at it," and he stretched forth his hand to snatch the precious token from Ned's grasp. But the boy sprang nimbly to one side and avoided him. This act served to increase the bully's malice and ill-will, however, and he flew into a towering passion.

"Give it here, you young cub," he commanded in an overbearing tone, "you stole my trade from me and now you've got to give me the posy; d'ye hear?"

"Let him alone, Bill," cried a chorus of voices; "the girl gave it to him, and you ain't going to have it."

"We'll see," retorted the bully, fiercely, as he rolled up his sleeves and assumed a threatening attitude. "The little cuss ain't goin' to have everything his own way let me tell yer."

Ned saw there was going to be trouble, but he had no idea of giving up his rose, so he deftly thrust it inside his jacket and buttoned the garment up to his chin. Then he folded his arms over it and stood waiting with an air of quiet determination for what was to follow.

"That's yer game, is it?" cried Bill, angrily, as he realized that his antagonist had no intention of yielding to his demand. "But it's no go—I'll thrash yer within an inch of yer life if ye don't pony over that flower double-quick. Hands off there," he continued, throwing out his arms to ward off the other boys, who would have kept him from Ned, and standing in mortal fear of him, they scattered like so many sheep before a hungry wolf.

All save Ned, who, with heightened color and a dangerous gleam in his eye, bravely stood his ground, determined to fight for his rights if driven to it, to the bitter end.

"Goin' ter give me the posy?" demanded Bill, approaching nearer with a menacing air.

"No."

"Then I'll make yer—blast yer! Ow—ow—ow—"

He had reached out one long arm to seize Ned by the collar, when the agile little fellow, watching his opportunity, sprang forward and planted one clinched fist, with all the strength of which he was master, directly under the bully's chin, taking him so by surprise and with such force as to nearly knock his teeth out of his head, and make the coward howl with pain as above.

But he recovered himself somewhat after a moment, when he began to bluster and swear, and doubtless would have returned to the fray, had not a policeman made his appearance around a corner, when he slowly retreated from the spot, rubbing his bruised chin, but vowing future vengeance upon Ned for his unexpected assault.

Ned watched him out of sight, then, feeling that he had had his share of business at the fountain for that day, he quietly wended his way to his own humble home in another quarter of the city.

CHAPTER II.

"I'M BOUND TO MAKE MY MARK IN THE WORLD."

Ned Wallingford had a long distance to walk before he reached his home, then up three flights of narrow stairs, in a miserable tenement-house on Harrison avenue, he stole with swift yet noiseless steps.

"Mamma may be sleeping," he murmured to himself. "I will not wake her if I can help it, for she sat up till midnight last night, working on those tiresome sacques."

But there was a glad smile on his lips, and a tender light in his eyes, as he toiled upward, one hand clasping that precious piece of silver, in the depths of his pocket, the other guarding the fragrant bud, which still lay hidden inside his jacket.

He reached the last landing, and, with gentle touch, turned the handle to the door of what answered as both kitchen and living-room, expecting to find it empty and his mother lying down in the small bedroom beyond.

But instead, he saw a slight, dark-robed figure sitting by a window, and bending over something in her lap.

"She is reading," he thought, the tender light in his eyes deepening as he stole on tiptoe to her side.

But suddenly he stopped and gave a great start, the red blood rushing in a crimson wave to his brow, a

look of shocked surprise and grief sweeping over his expressive face.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, in a voice of reproach, not unminged with horror. "It is Sunday—did you forget?"

The woman now gave a violent start and turned toward him a pale, pained face, which was strangely beautiful and refined, in spite of its excessive pallor, while tears rushed into her lovely dark blue eyes at his words.

In her hands was an infant's dainty wool sacque and an ivory crochet-hook.

She had been so absorbed in her work that she had not heard her boy come into the room; but both work and hands had dropped upon her lap at Ned's sudden exclamation of dismay, and now a faint tinge of red crept into her cheeks, as she met his reproachful glance.

"No, I did not forget," she said, gently but sadly.

"And you made me recite the commandments this morning, and told me not to forget the fourth," Ned continued, while his troubled eyes returned to the soft fleecy thing in her lap with a look of condemnation.

"I know it, dear," his mother answered, sadly, "and I wanted you to especially remember that this was the Lord's day, because you come in contact with so many rude boys. I am sorry, Ned, that you should have found me working to-day," she went on, regretfully, as she fondly slipped her arm about him, "for I know that a mother's example is everything to her son, and I would not have you lose an atom of your

respect for me. I am more sorry than I can express that I was obliged to do any work on this holy day; but, Ned, dear, it was absolutely necessary that this lot of sacques should be finished—that they be delivered at the store by eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I know," Ned said, gravely, then asked: "How many more have you to do?"

"This is the last one," replied his mother; "I intended that they should all have been finished by last evening, and they would have been, but for that attack of pleurisy which I had Friday."

"I know," Ned said again, with a quiver of his under lip, as he recalled his mother's suffering, adding, tenderly, as he passed his arm around her neck, "poor mamma!"

"I promised, you remember," Mrs. Wallingford went on, "and the firm gave me the work only upon that condition. I also promised that I would not fail to have the rent money ready when the agent calls to-morrow. He will be here by ten, and I can only fulfill my agreement with him by getting my pay for the sacques. I shall not be able to quite make up the amount, as it is," the fair woman said, with a sigh, "but I do not believe he will turn us out for so slight a deficiency."

"How much will you need to make it up?" Ned asked, thoughtfully.

"Only twenty-five cents. I should have had enough and some to spare, only if I take out more work, the firm will keep back seventy-five cents to pay for the worsted," Mrs. Wallingford explained.

Ned drew his small brown hand from his pocket and quietly laid his piece of silver upon his mother's knee.

"This will make it all right, mamma," he said, "and you will not need to ask any favor from the landlord," he concluded, proudly.

"Why, Ned! where did you get it?" Mrs. Wallingford inquired, in a tone of surprise and with an anxious settling of the lines about her sweet, sensitive mouth.

"A gentleman gave it to me for unchecking his horses at the drinking fountain, out near Longwood Avenue."

"Gave you a quarter! I thought the most you ever received for such a service was a nickel, or a dime!" and Mrs. Wallingford searched the grave little face with a keen, apprehensive glance.

"I don't usually; but this was a span and the gentleman was very nice and kind," Ned returned; then he related all that had occurred in connection with his adventure of the afternoon. He did not forget to speak of the beautiful little girl and her full-blooded pug, and proudly displayed his rosebud in proof of his story.

"Ned, dear, I am afraid that neither of us has kept the Sabbath according to the strict letter of the law," his mother remarked, a sad smile flitting over her pale lips; "but I trust, under the circumstances, we shall be forgiven. I hope that I shall never need to break the command again, or have occasion to conceal such an act from you. But I hate to take your quarter, dear, to help pay the rent," she concluded, a suspicious tremulousness in her gentle tones.

"I was going to spend most of it, anyway, mamma, to get you some nice tea—you haven't had any for more than a week," said the boy, as he bent to kiss her cheek. "But—but——" an expression of keen anxiety wrinkled his young brow. "Haven't you any money at all, mamma?"

"No, dear, I had to give you the last to get me the medicine last Friday," and the woman had difficulty in checking the sob of anguish which nearly burst from her lips, for she had never been quite so destitute before.

"But—but what are we going to do?" Ned inquired, with a look of dismay.

"You shall not go hungry, my boy," Mrs. Wallingford returned. "I have two or three pounds of meal in the closet, which will be sufficient to last for several days, to make gruel for me and hasty-pudding for you—you like that, you know. There there is one can of condensed milk and a small piece of smoked halibut, so I think we can get along until I can do another dozen sacques—if that pain in my side does not come on again," she concluded, trying to speak cheerfully, but suppressing a weary sigh.

Ned studied her face earnestly for a few moments, then said, appealingly :

"You will not work any more to-day?"

"No, dear; I can easily finish the sacque now, by getting up early to-morrow morning, and, please God, I will never break His holy day again," Miriam Wallingford reverently replied.

She then carefully put Ned's quarter into her empty

purse, after which she folded her work and laid it away.

"Now, Ned," she continued, in a more cheerful tone, "if you will bring a little water from the first floor, I will make a nice dish of pudding for your supper; you must be hungry, child, if you have walked away out to that fountain and back this hot afternoon."

Ned took a two-quart pail from a shelf, and retraced his steps to the street floor, for there was no water to be had anywhere else in the house.

There was a very serious look on his young face, all the way down, as if considering some weighty matter. He had never fully realized, until to-day, what a heavy burden of responsibility had been pressing upon his mother's heart during the last few months.

Reaching the lower floor, he filled his pail from the common faucet in the hall, and was about to reascend the stairs when a sudden puff of wind whisked a portion of a newspaper into the narrow entry, blowing it close to the boy's feet.

He stooped to pick it up, and saw that it was a sheet of the Sunday Herald, published that very day, and which some one had dropped or thrown aside in the street.

Returning with the water to his mother, he filled the tea kettle for her, then sat down to look over the paper while she prepared their frugal supper.

Ned was at first somewhat disgusted to find the pages mostly devoted to advertising; there were only three or four columns which contained anything of interest to the boy, and, having eagerly scanned these, he was about to thrust the paper aside, when suddenly, under

the heading of "Wants," his eye caught sight of the following advertisement:

WANTED—CASH BOYS, ERRAND BOYS. SMART, willing workers only need apply to Mr. FLINT, between 8 and 9, at R. H. WHITE & CO.'S.

Ned's eyes lighted, and his face grew animated.

School was done—the long summer vacation was before him, with nothing to do but to lounge about the streets, or help his mother with what little he could.

Why should he not apply for a position as "cash boy," and earn something toward his own support and the rent, which became due so often, and seemed so hard to pay?

He sat very quiet, holding the paper listlessly in his hands and gazing out of the window at the stone wall opposite, pondering this important question, until his mother called softly but a little sadly:

"Come, Neddie, supper is ready."

It was a very meagre supper, indeed; only a plateful of hasty pudding, well salted, and a little condensed milk, diluted with water to eat with it; while Mrs. Wallingford's portion consisted of a bowl of simple gruel, without even the addition of milk. But Ned made no complaint. He was hungry, with a growing boy's appetite—the pudding tasted fairly good, and was satisfying, and he even ate more than he wanted—in fact, cleared his plate, lest his other should think he did not enjoy it, and be troubled.

"Now you just sit still, Marmee," he said, in a playful tone, when their humble meal was finished, "make believe that I am a girl, and let me wash the dishes."

"You are a good boy, Ned," she returned, flashing a tender smile and a grateful look upon him, "and I believe I will; I sat up so late last night I feel unusually languid. You are a real comfort to me, dear."

"More than I should have been if I had been a girl?" Ned asked, roguishly.

"Yes, indeed," was the quick, almost sharp reply, while a hot wave of color flashed over the woman's pale face. "A girl never could have battled with—ah!" suddenly checking herself—then added—"with the trials that are before us, as well as I think you will, Ned. I expect," she continued, with a smile, and an evident effort to conceal the emotion which had so threatened her composure, "that you will take care of me when you are a man."

"I'm going to begin before I'm a man, Marmee,"—he always called her that when felt especially tender toward her—"I am going to begin right away."

Mrs. Wallingford smiled, but gave his words no especial significance, and, leaning back in her chair, closed her eyes wearily, for she had worked rapidly and steadily all day upon the little sacques to make up for the time lost on Friday, when pain and weakness had rendered her hands nerveless and strengthless to perform their task.

Ned was very handy about the house, so soon had his dishes washed, wiped and put away; then, drawing a cricket to his mother's feet, he sat down beside her, and, looking gravely up into her face, remarked:

"Mother, I want to go into R. H. White's store to-morrow morning, as a cash boy."

"Why, Ned! what put such an idea into your head?" Mrs. Wallingford exclaimed, in unfeigned surprise.

"I've just read an advertisement in the paper; the firm want errand and cash boys. School's done, and I believe I'd better be in a store than running about the streets, or lounging in the house. Besides, I'd be earning something, and that would help you a little."

Tears sprang into his mother's eyes.

"But you are so young, Ned," she objected.

"I've seen boys younger than I in the stores," he replied.

So had she; but still she hesitated.

"I'm afraid the confinement would not be good for you."

"Please let me try it, Marmee," Ned pleaded, "and if I do not like the place, or if it should be too hard, I can give it up at any time, you know. There's Hal Simmons—he gets six dollars a month, and if I could get as much it would almost pay the rent."

The idea was so new to Mrs. Wallingford, that she still demurred. She feared that the confinement and weariness of being on his feet so much, while he was growing so fast, might undermine his constitution. But he urged and argued so eloquently, she finally said he might try it for a while, and the boy went to bed happy and with a sense of importance such as he had never known before.

He was up bright and early the next morning, blacking and polishing his well-worn shoes to the last degree of brightness, brushing his patched and threadbare

clothes and trying to make himself as presentable as possible in every respect.

His mother thought one could hardly give a thought to his clothing after glancing into his frank, bright face, and she smiled fondly across the table at him, as they sat down again to "mush and milk," for, to her, he looked very attractive and lovable. He was in high spirits, and talked volubly all through breakfast, laying many plans, and was so hopeful for the future that Mrs. Wallingford laughingly told him that he reminded her of the dairy-maid and her eggs.

"And you haven't even the eggs yet, Ned," she concluded, playfully.

"You mean I haven't got the situation yet," he said, gravely. "Well, I know I havent; but"—resolutely—"I'm going to get it before night, and then you shall see how fast I will climb the ladder, until by and by you will not need to work at all. If I'd been a girl, though, I don't suppose I should have so good a chance."

Ned had always seemed to have a jealous fear that his mother might have loved him better if he had been a girl, though just what had given rise to this feeling it would be hard to say. Perhaps it was because he was so fond of girls himself.

"I've always been very glad that you were a boy," his mother gravely remarked.

"Have you, really?" he exclaimed, looking up with a delighted smile. "That makes me feel good, only if we were not so poor I should have been very happy if I could have had a sister."

Mrs. Wallingford sighed, and a look of pain leaped into her eyes at his remark.

She made no reply to it, but as he arose from the table, observed:

"You have made yourself look very tidy, dear, considering your resources. Don't you want to put your rose in your buttonhole?" and she glanced at the dainty flower on the mantel.

"No, indeed, Marmee, I'm going to keep that bud always," he returned, with a flush. "Say, will you let me have that pretty little ivory box to keep it in when it fades? It is just about large enough," and he regarded the bud with a tender glance which plainly indicated that it was very precious to him.

Mrs. Wallingford smiled at this evidence of sentiment in one so young.

"Yes, you may have the box, Ned; but I had no idea that you were so sentimental," she said, amusedly.

Ned flushed, more at the tone than because he comprehended her meaning.

"I don't often get roses, Marmee," he said, "and that little girl was the prettiest and kindest one I ever saw. If," he added, with grave reflection, which nearly convulsed his listener, "I should grow to be a man, and marry anybody, I should choose a girl with blue eyes and golden hair, and—she should have a pug, too, if she wanted one."

"Oh, Ned! Ned!" cried his mother, laughing out musically, "you're counting uncertain chickens again."

"Can't help it; my thinking machine keeps going, and I just have to let off steam. I'm bound to make my

mark in the world, too—you see if I don't," he retorted, with irrepressible buoyancy, as he lifted his face for a parting kiss.

"Now another for good luck," he said, snatching a second. "You'll see," he added, with gleaming eyes, "I shall come home a man of business—Hurrah! Good-by, Marmee," and, seizing his hat, the eager, hopeful boy dashed down the stairs and away upon his errand, while the gentle but sad-hearted woman whom he left behind him sat down and burst into a passion of bitter tears.

CHAPTER III.

"STOP, EDWARD WALLINGFORD! I'M NOT THROUGH WITH YOU YET!"

It was just half-past seven when Ned reached the entrance to R. H. White's great establishment, on Washington street. Of course it was not open at that hour, but Ned had intended to be in good season and so he took up his station by the door where, ere long, he was joined by several other boys, until by eight o'clock, between twenty and thirty had gathered there to apply for situations.

At eight precisely the great doors were unfastened and in rushed the whole crowd, each eager to be first at the office. But they were instantly marshaled into line by a floor-walker, who made them file in an orderly manner before Mr. Flint, who was to pronounce sentence upon them.

Poor Ned felt as if his chance was small among so many, and most of them older than he; but, as it happened, he was the very first one to be singled out by the gentleman, his bright, clean face, nicely-brushed hair, and quiet manner having prepossessed him in his favor.

"Your name?" demanded Mr. Flint, while his eagle eyes searched the frank countenance looking so earnestly into his.

"Edward Wallingford, sir."

"Age?"

"Twelve last March."

"Where do you live?"

"No. — Harrison Avenue."

"With your parents?"

"With my mother, sir; I have no father."

"What do you want to do, errands or cash?"

"Anything that you wish, sir."

"Hum—obliging, I'm sure," said the man, approvingly. "When can you come?"

"I'd like to begin now," said Ned eagerly.

"All right, youngster; that's business, and you shall. Here, Morris"—beckoning to a clerk—"take this lad to the manager of the retail hosiery departmenmt, and tell him to instruct him regarding his duties. Your pay will be a dollar and a half a week for the first month," he continued, to Ned, "and, if you do well, will be raised to two dollars after that."

Our young hero was then marched off to the stocking counter, where he was at once launched upon his business career.

He was bright, quick and willing, and so civil and

obliging to the clerks that he became a general favorite before the day was over.

"Smart little chap, that—bright as a button, and ready to do anything you ask him," remarked one of the clerks to another, during the afternoon of Ned's first day of service.

"Humph! he's smart enough; but as for being obliging, that's the way with them all the first week or so; but it soon wears off, and I'll wager he'll be no better than the comomn run a fortnight hence."

But this prophet of evil failed for once in his prognostications, for Ned was bound to please and bound to rise, and he diligently and faithfully performed every duty, never forgetting to be civil and good-natured even in the midst of the greatest rush of business.

One rarely sees a prouder or a happier boy than he was when Saturday noon came—it was now the first of July, and Saturday afternoon was given to all the employees of the great store during the months of July and August—and he put into his mother's hands his first week's earnings, even though it was the small sum of one dollar and a half.

Mrs. Wallingford kissed him with tremulous lips.

"You dear boy," she said, fondly, as she smoothed back the moist hair from his forehead, "aren't you tired out?"

"No, indeed, Marmee, I feel as frisky as a kitten; and just think, I have all this afternoon to play, or rest, or do anything I like," he returned, brightly, and bravely refraining from mentioning the fact that he had a great blister on each heel, where his old shoes had

chafed him in running back and forth about his duties.

But he did not care to spend the afternoon in play; he remained quietly in the house, and though he tried hard to conceal that his feet and legs ached in every joint, he could not wholly blind his fond and watchful mother to his wearisome and uncomfortable condition.

Sunday proved to be a rainy day, and Ned was not sorry, for he did not feel much like going to Sunday school. He was glad enough of an excuse to lie on the lounge and rest his weary limbs, while he read aloud to his mother from his library book.

Mrs. Wallingford, too, was glad to rest, and felt quietly grateful to have a dollar and a half in her purse with which to begin the week. She had not been as well as usual during the last few days, consequently she had not been able to finish her work, and she had found it very difficult to provide sufficient food for their absolute needs during the week just ended.

Monday morning, however, found Ned much refreshed, and ready to begin his work again. The blisters were nearly healed, and his legs "as limber as ever," so he started forth to resume his duties with as much courage and enthusiasm as ever.

On Wednesday morning of this second week, as he was crossing from Essex street into Chauncy, his sharp eyes caught sight of a small green roll lying close to the curbing of the sidewalk.

Stooping to pick it up, he discovered it to be a roll of money.

A thrill of joy went tingling through him to his very toes, as he clutched it in his small brown hands, while

his heart beat with great startled pulsations, the excitement of the discovery making him almost faint for a moment. But, regaining his composure after a moment, he examined the tiny roll and found that it was composed of four ten-dollar bills, in fresh, crisp greenbacks.

"Forty dollars!" he murmured, with a sense of exultation, not unmingled with wonder; "was there ever such a lucky boy? Now, Marmee can have a whole pound of nice tea, and a lot of other things. I can have a new jacket, and a pair of trousers, and—but——"

A feeling of dismay shot through him as the thought came to him that the money did not rightly belong to him—that some unfortunate person had lost it, and it must be returned to the owner as soon as possible.

"If it was only mine," Ned sighed, wistfully, "Marmee could go away to the seashore for a week or two; she looks so thin and pale, and that endless crocheting keeps the pain in her side bad all the time. But—oh, dear! it wouldn't be honest to keep it."

He refolded and thrust the bills, with a half-desperate air, into his pocket, and walked on, trying to whistle in an indifferent way, although a vigorous struggle was going on between his conscience and this terrible temptation, which had come upon him in such a time of need.

"Mother would never use it," he said to himself, "but I do need a new suit—my trousers are patched so I am ashamed to turn my back to anybody; my jacket is darned, besides getting too small, and too short in the sleeves, and I surely ought to have a straw hat in-

stead of this hot, heavy cap. I—I could buy a piece at a time, and—and say it was given to me.”

“Thou shalt not steal.”

It seemed almost as if the words had been shouted at him through a trumpet, for they fell like a stinging lash upon his conscience, and the blood rushed hot and red into his face with a sense of shame and dishonor.

“I wonder what makes people have such horrid thoughts,” he murmured. “A thief and a liar! ugh! What an ugly sound it has! I never told a lie yet, and I never stole a penny; I guess I won’t begin now, just as I’ve got into business for myself, to ruin my reputation. No, sir, I’ll be honest, if I have to wear patches three deep.”

With a look of resolution on his young face, he quickened his pace almost to a run, as if he hoped thus to outrun the temptaion, and, entering the store, made his way dircetly to the superintendent of his department, and told him what had occurred, producing the bills in corroboration of his story.

The man, looking into the frank, clear eyes upraised to his, realized and admired the nobility of the boy.

“Well, sir, you are a lucky youngster,” he remarked, as he counted the money which Ned had given to him.

“I think that somebody else has been very unlucky,” Ned quietly returned.

“Wouldn’t you like to keep these bills?” the gentleman asked, just to test him.

“I should like to have forty dollars, sir, more than I can tell you, for my mother and I are very poor,” Ned

said, very gravely, "but I would not like to keep this money from its rightful owner."

"That's the way to talk, my boy!" said the superintendent, in a tone of hearty commendation. "Always stick to those principles of honor and you'll make a noble man."

Ned colored with pleasure.

He felt prouder to have won such praise from his superior, than he would to have been presented with the forty dollars. Still, he wished that those covetous thoughts, on finding the money, had not come to him; they made him feel ashamed and half guilty, and there was no one to tell him that he was a stronger and better boy because they had come to him and he had resisted them, thus gaining a signal victory, and strengthening him against future temptations.

"I suppose it will have to be advertised," he said, after a moment of thought, while his color deepened; "but I haven't any money to pay for it."

"I will attend to that," the superintendent replied, "but if the money isn't called for after four weeks, you can claim it, less the charge for advertising."

"Can I?" Ned exclaimed, with a sudden joyful heart-throb, then instantly felt ashamed of himself for it, and added, "All the same, sir, I hope the owner will come for it."

He went away to his work after that, and tried to think no more about it.

The superintendent took the money to the office to be deposited, and related to a member of the firm the cir-

cumstances of Ned finding it, and enlarged upon his evident honesty and nobility of purpose.

"Keep your eye on that youngster, Mr. Pratt, for a few weeks," was the proprietor's reply, "and if he continues to show himself capable and worthy we will advance him. An honest boy like that is worth keeping and using well."

So, if Ned had but known it, the conquering of a great temptation was likely to prove of greater and more lasting benefit to him than the forty dollars would have been.

Three weeks slipped by, and nothing worthy of note occurred to our youthful hero.

He continued to be prompt and diligent in his business, was kind and attentive to the clerks, whose bidding he was hired to do, while his unvarying cheerfulness, and a certain wit and quickness at repartee won him a warm place in every heart. One morning an old brush, while a bootblack would have improved his the desk of the cashier of the firm.

He was small of stature, with a thin and rather aristocratic face, keen gray eyes, overshadowed by heavy iron-gray brows, and hair of the same hue. He was clad in a dark, mixed suit that had evidently done service for a long time, and which would have been much the better for the use of a wisp and a sponge. His linen was fresh and clean, however, but his hat—a stovepipe of somewhat ancient date—like his suit, needed the brush, while a bootblack would have improved his shoes, as to color and polish, if not as to fit.

"I've come to see about this," he briefly remarked,

as he shoved a slip of printed paper through the window of the cashier's desk.

It was the advertisement regarding the finding of some money, which the superintendent of Ned's department had caused to be inserted in two of the leading papers of the city.

"Well, what about it?" as briefly demanded the cashier, while he shot a searching glance into the aged face before him.

"Simply this—I lost a roll of bills—four tens, issued by the Provident Bank on the seventh of July, and somewhere between Avon and Beach streets, going down Chauncy," the old man explained.

"Um," said the cashier, thoughtfully, "the seventh of July—it is now the twenty-eighth; why haven't you made inquiries for it before?"

"For the reason that I was obliged to leave town on business that same day, and did not see the advertisement until my return yesterday."

"Um," said the cashier, "I'll see about it."

He went to another desk, talked to a gentleman there for a few moments, then returned to the window and handed the little old man his money.

"I guess it's yours without any doubt," he returned.

"Yes, sir, it is mine," he confidently returned, after glancing at it. "Where was it found?"

"Close to the curbing on Essex street."

"Who found it?"

"One of our cash boys."

"What's to pay?"

"The charges for advertising, of course"—naming

the sum—"and whatever besides that you and the boy can agree upon."

"Humph! Where will I find the boy?" the man asked, as he handed out the money for the advertisement.

"I will send for him to come here," replied the cashier, as he wrote rapidly upon a slip of paper. Then calling a boy, he sent him down to the hosiery counter with it.

Five minutes later the boy returned, accompanied by Ned, who, not knowing what was wanted of him, looked rather flushed and anxious at being summoned to the office.

"This gentleman wishes to talk with you for a few moments," remarked the cashier, indicating the stranger, and then returned to his books.

Ned lifted his great, frank, black eyes to the aged face, and the man gave a violent start, while a strange pallor settled over his countenance as he looked into them.

"What's your name?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Edward Wallingford," Ned replied, wondering what the man could want of him.

"Wallingford! Wallingford!" he repeated, a startled look leaping into his eyes. "Do you—are you——" He abruptly paused here, and after a moment added: "So you are the boy who found the money?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I found forty dollars. Was it yours?" Ned eagerly inquired, but flushing violently, for, despite all his efforts to resist the sin of covetousness, he could

not help hoping that the money might have been lost by some rich person who would not take the trouble to search for it, and thus it would eventually come to him.

"Yes, it was mine. Where did you find it?"

"Just on the corner of Essex and Chauncy streets."

"Well, I suppose you expect a reward. How much have I got to pay you for finding it?" the man asked sharply, as he fastened his keen, eagle glance upon the boy's handsome face.

Ned flushed again, and his eyes grew very bright with some repressed emotion; but he quietly replied:

"Nothing, sir; I am glad that you have your money back, and you are very welcome to what I have done."

He turned on his heel, and was about to go back to his duties, when the eccentric old man cried out, more sharply than he had yet spoken, though a queer little smile lurked about the corners of his mouth:

"Stop, Edward Wallingford; I haven't got through with you yet."

CHAPTER IV.

NED IS TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

Ned faced about obediently, the indignant blood still tingling in his cheeks, but all sense of injury and irritation vanishing immediately when he caught sight of the quizzical expression on the old gentleman's face.

"He's a funny old chap," was his mental comment.

"I thought he was cross, but I guess he isn't—he's only queer, though I bet he's awful tight.

"So I'm welcome to my money, am I?" repeated the stranger. "That's rather refreshing. Didn't you expect to be paid for finding and returning it?"

"I don't think I expected much about it, anyway," Ned responded; "I found it, and I knew it was right that I should do my best to hunt up the owner, whether I got anything for it or not."

"But you think I ought to give you something, don't you?" persisted his interlocutor.

Ned colored crimson again at the question; it was not very pleasant to be catechised in this way regarding the duty of another, and he hardly knew what reply to make.

If the man had no sense of his own obligation, he was sure he was not going to instruct him as to his duty. He knew that if he had been in his place he would have been glad to give a poor boy a generous sum, and not make him feel uncomfortable over it, either.

"I rather think I'd like to give you something, if you'll say how much would satisfy you," pursued the old gentleman, as he still hesitated and appeared confused, while he regarded him curiously.

"Well, sir," Ned now said, and thinking he had better end the interview and get back to his work, "if you'd really like to make me some return—though I wouldn't claim anything—I should feel very much obliged to you if you'd buy me a straw hat; my old cap isn't very comfortable this hot weather. They have some very decent ones in the store for fifty cents."

The aged stranger's keen gray eyes twinkled and the corners of his mouth twitched with amusement at this very moderate request.

"A straw hat, eh! So you've been wearing a cap all summer—a woolen one?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doesn't the firm pay you enough so that you could afford to buy yourself a straw hat?"

A flash of anger leaped into the boy's eyes, and his lips involuntarily curled with contempt, for he imagined that the man—"the mean old miser" as he mentally dubbed him—was unwilling to put out even the small sum of fifty cents in return for his forty dollars.

"I get a dollar and a half a week, sir," he said, trying to speak in a respectful tone out of reverence for his gray head, though his voice trembled in spite of himself with suppressed wrath, "but never mind the hat—I can go without it a while longer."

"Tut! tut!" returned his companion, with a chuckle. "Edward Wallingford, you are a boy of considerable character, and I like spirit, if it is tempered with moderation. I guess we will mind about the hat; suppose you show me to the counter where they are sold."

The man's voice was now kind and genial, and a pleasant smile was hovering about his thin lips.

Ned was quick to mark the change in him, and his own brow instantly cleared.

"Yes, sir; this way, please," he said, eagerly, and turning, led the way to another part of the store, his eccentric companion following as fast as he was able.

Reaching the hat counter he ignored the fifty-cent

hats entirely, and, passing on, made Ned try on several at a dollar apiece, until he found one that fitted him, whereupon he immediately purchased it.

"Now is there any other little thing that you need?" he inquired, as he waited for his change, and running his glance over the boy's trim figure, noting his clean, nicely ironed, but cheap, shirt-waist, his worn, but neatly mended trousers and patched shoes.

"No, sir, thank you, and I am very much obliged for the hat; it's a dandy!" Ned responded, with luminous eyes, as he twirled it on his hand and regarded it with satisfaction.

"And you are satisfied with it, in return for finding the forty dollars?" the man asked, curiously.

"Yes, indeed, sir; and mother will be pleased, too—my old cap was so shabby it made her feel badly to have me wear it."

"Humph!" grunted the old gentleman, "your mother will be pleased—how about your father?"

"I haven't any father," said Ned, gravely.

"Um—ah! Where did you get those great black eyes?" the man now asked, observing him with a strangely intense look, Ned thought.

"From my father, I think, sir, for my mother has the loveliest blue eyes you ever saw," he answered, a tender inflection in his tone as he spoke thus of his mother.

"Where do you live?" was the next query, but the aged lips were almost colorless as they voiced it.

"No. — Harrison Avenue, fourth floor. Now, if you don't mind, sir, I think I ought to go back to my work."

"What is your work?"

"I'm a cash boy at the gents' hosiery counter."

"And you only get a dollar and a half a week?"

"Yes, sir; but if I do well they will give me a raise by and by!" Ned said, cheerfully.

"Well, I'd like to ask you just one more question, then you may go," the man said, drawing him a little one side, that no one else might hear.

"All right, sir."

"When you found that roll of bills, Edward Wallingford, didn't you want to keep it?"

All the blood in Ned's body seemed to fly into his face again at this pointed question.

His head drooped, and tears of mingled anger and shame rushed to his eyes.

It seemed very cruel that he must be made to confess the conflict which had raged between the, to him, terrible temptation and his conscience.

The superintendent had asked him the same question. Did everybody imagine that he must possess a thievish disposition—that because he was a poor boy he was utterly devoid of principles of honor?

He felt bitterly humiliated, and had his inquisitor been a younger man he would have resented what he considered his insolent curiosity.

"Yes, sir," he said, humbly, and too truthful to evade the query, while he nervously twirled his hat in his hands. "You see, we are so poor—mother had been sick, and—and I did think that if those forty dollars were only mine, she could go away from the hot city for a little while and get strong again. I know it

wasn't right even to wish to keep it—but I just couldn't help thinking of it. At any rate"—and now the great black eyes flashed frankly into the old gentleman's face—"I didn't keep it. I wouldn't be a thief for the biggest fortune in the world, and I am glad you have it back again. Good-by, sir," and turning, he darted away before the man could stop him, and ran nimbly downstairs to his duties, hoping he should never meet the owner of that forty dollars again, but wondering what the name of the "queer old codger" could be.

When he went home at noon he told his mother all about his interview with him, and displayed his nice new hat with considerable pride.

Mrs. Wallingford was somewhat amused over the recital, and a trifle indignant, as well, that her boy should have been subjected to such a catechising, while she also thought the man rather mean to have bestowed only a dollar upon him in return for the large sum he had lost.

But both Ned and his mother changed their opinion regarding the eccentric old gentleman that very evening, when the last post brought a letter directed in a cramped, old-fashioned hand to "Edward Wallingford, No. — Harrison Avenue, Boston, Mass."

They wondered, before they opened it, who it could be from, for they never received letters, having no friends or relatives with whom to correspond.

When Ned cut the end of the envelope across two slips of paper fell out.

Picking up the first that came to hand, he read aloud :

"The inclosed is for the very modest, honest lad who struggled so nobly with a great temptation, a few weeks ago, and who was always so courteous to an inquisitive old man this morning. Be honest always, my boy; you will then never lack for friends, and the world will be the better for your having lived in it."

There was no name signed to this characteristic epistle, which was a great disappointment to Ned, and to Mrs. Wallingford also, who now realized that this strange being had only been trying to test Ned by his searching questions and his apparent penuriousness.

Upon unfolding the other slip of paper the happy boy found it to be a postal money-order for ten dollars!

"Hurrah! Marmee, the old codger is a brick, after all!" he exclaimed, waving the money-order aloft, while his face was radiant with delight. "Now," he continued, more gravely, "this will feed us for nearly a month; can't you have a nice rest, mother, and not work on those horrid sacques?"

Mrs. Wallingford smiled as she fondly kissed his glowing cheeks.

"I do not know about taking the rest, my dear," she said, "but I am prouder of my son to-night than I should be to have had a large fortune left me," and tears stood in her eyes to emphasize her words.

But Ned, boy-like, thought more of the money than of the act which had brought it to him.

"Ten dollars! we haven't had so much at once for a long time!" he said. "That old man has done the handsome thing, and I thought him such a skinflint this morning. I imagined it was almost like pulling his eye-teeth—though I don't believe he had any—for him to

pay out that dollar for my hat. What a pity it is we cannot know his name," he concluded, regretfully.

"I think he has been very generous, and I, too, would like to know who he is, so that we might thank him," Mrs. Wallingford remarked.

And thus the resisting of evil, the conquering of a temptation, brought an abundant reward. Ned had not only gained the respect of his superintendent, the confidence of his employer, and the prospect of advancement at the store, but he had also won a snug little sum of money, and made a friend of the strange old gentleman, who, as we shall see later, had it in his power to do even greater things for him.

When Ned had left the man so abruptly that morning, the latter stood staring after the boy for a full minute without moving.

"I'm afraid I was a trifle hard on the youngster," he muttered, as, recovering from his surprise, he made his way toward the elevator to descend to the street floor; "but I felt curious to see what kind of stuff he is made of. He's a conscientious little chap; most boys would have denied being tempted to keep that money; but he owned up to it, like a little hero, and he shan't lose anything by it. He's got spirit, though," he continued, as, emerging from the elevator, he elbowed his way through the crowd into the street; "he was downright mad at me for quizzing him at such a rate, and yet he would not show any disrespect to an old man; which goes to prove that he has been well brought up. A fifty-cent straw hat, indeed! ha, ha!" he laughed, gleefully, as he waved his umbrella to hail a car. "Most boys

would have dunned me for a couple of dollars, at least. He gave me a shock, though, when he lifted those great black eyes to me; and the name, too—Wallingford—gave me a start. I believe, upon my word, that was the name of the girl whom that scamp of a nephew of mine used to be sweet on. I wonder if the boy can be a relative of hers—I wonder if she had any brothers. Heigho! that was more than thirteen years ago, and Dick was my only sister's son. What a pity he was such a rascal! How he ever came by such a disposition is more than I can understand, for Rachel was an angel, while Tom, her husband, though pig-headed and grouty, was always honorable in business matters. I wonder if the boy is still living—I've never heard a blessed word from or of him since he disappeared so suddenly that winter. What a pity; what a pity!" he continued, with a sigh that was almost a groan; "if he had only behaved himself he might have come into a handsome fortune, and I need not have been the lonely old man that I am to-day. But that boy's black eyes haunt me. Zounds! what if——"

A perfectly blank expression overspread the man's face as he reached this point in his soliloquy, while he became almost ghastly. Then he boarded the car, which had stopped at his signal, and a few minutes later he was applying for the money-order which Ned received that very evening.

Two days after this, while Miriam Wallingford was busily working upon a tiny wool sacque, she suddenly became conscious of a strange sound on the stairs leading up to her humble rooms.

There was a tender, yet somewhat amused smile on her sweet lips, as her polished needle flew in and out among the fleecy meshes, for she was thinking of Ned's recent adventure with the queer old man whose money he had found, and vainly speculating as to his identity.

But now she paused to listen to the unusual sound upon each stair, as if some one lame was mounting with the use of a cane.

Presently it ceased, and there came a knock upon her door.

Rising to open it, she found, to her surprise, the object of her thoughts standing outside.

She was sure it was Ned's old gentleman from the description which he had given of him.

"Beg pardon, marm, but I'm looking for Mrs. Wallingford; I was told she lived up here," he abruptly remarked, while his keen gray eyes swept her face, noting its refined and delicate beauty, its excessive pallor, its lines of suffering and care, all of which betrayed that her life had known some crushing sorrow.

"I am Mrs. Wallingford, sir. Will you come in and be seated?" she replied, with graceful self-possession, as she drew forward for him the only comfortable chair in the room.

"Thank you, marm; thank you. It's rather tedious climbing so many stairs on a stretch; don't you find it so?" remarked her visitor, as he seated himself, removed his hat, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Yes, sir; but I do not go down unless I am obliged

to; my son attends to my errands, and brings all the water for me," the lady replied.

"Water!" exclaimed her companion, aghast, "you don't mean that you have to go down all those stairs for water?"

"Yes, sir; the landlord will not have a pipe put up here, so all the water has to be brought from the first floor in a pail," Mrs. Wallingford quietly replied.

The man became so exceedingly red in the face that the lady feared the exertion of mounting the stairs had been too much for him."

"Who is your landlord?" he demanded, dryly, after a moment of awkward silence.

"I do not know his name; but that of his agent is Flagg."

"Humph! What rent do you pay?" her visitor inquired, as he glanced around the humble room.

"We have three rooms, and pay ten dollars a month," Mrs. Wallingford said, with a sigh, as she thought how hard it was to raise the sum named every four weeks.

"Ten dollars a month for this oven, and no water in it!" cried the man, every vein standing out on his brow, an angry light in his gray eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"It's downright extortion—it's a double swindle!" was the wrathful retort.

Mrs. Wallingford looked so astonished over his excitement that he immediately pulled himself together, and apologized for it.

"I beg pardon, marm," he said, "but I am rather upset by what you have told me. I am the owner of

this house—there are four tenants in it, and I receive fourteen, twelve, nine, and seven dollars respectively for them. I have been in Europe for the last three years, during which time my business has been in the hands of an agent, who, I perceive, has been systematically robbing me and oppressing my tenants.”

“Can that be possible!” exclaimed Mrs. Wallingford. “Then I have been paying three dollars a month more than I need to have paid.”

“Exactly; but it shall all be refunded to you, and water shall be carried to every floor. Bless my heart! to think of anybody bringing water up those three flights! I never dreamed of such a thing. How long have you lived her?”

“It was a year last May since we came.”

“Humph! that’ll make you in the neighborhood of forty-five dollars coming to you, and I expect the other tenants have been squeezed in the same way. Well, marm, we’ll give our agent a taste of the same kind of treatment; but I didn’t come here to-day to talk about rents,” he remarked, more quietly, then added abruptly: “that’s a fine boy you have up at R. H. White’s.”

“Yes, Ned is a nice boy, and very good to his mother, too,” Miriam Wallingford answered, and flushing a lovely color at this praise of her son. Then lifting her beautiful eyes to her visitor’s face, she added: “I think you must be the gentleman whose money he found.”

“Just so, marm.”

“You were very kind—we have both wished we might have an opportunity to thank you for your generosity to Ned,” she continued, gratefully.

The old gentleman looked embarrassed.

"I didn't come here for that, either," he bluntly remarked. "I came to tell you that it is a sin for a smart, bright, honest boy like that, to be shut up in a close store, and running his legs off from morning till night for twenty-five cents a day."

CHAPTER V.

A PROSPECTIVE CHANGE FOR NED AND HIS MOTHER.

Mrs. Wallingford flushed and looked somewhat distressed by this rather harsh criticism regarding Ned's employment.

"The pay is very little, I know," she returned, "and Ned does get very weary—I can see it, though he has never complained. But it was his own idea—he wanted to try it, and I allowed him to do so; in fact, it seemed to be necessary, just at that time, for him to make an effort to earn something, as my health seemed to be giving out, and I could not earn enough for our support."

"And my agent had been plundering you, too," interposed her companion, with a frown.

"I am sure you were not to blame for that," was the gentle reply, "your recent generosity has proven that."

"Tut! tut! How old is the boy?" the man broke in, hastily.

"Twelve last March."

"And you're a widow?"

Miriam Wallingford's eyes drooped and a flame of vivid scarlet dyed her pale cheeks, while her sweet lips trembled, as she simply bowed her head to his query.

The man searched her face keenly for a moment, then remarked:

"There used to be a family of Wallingfords in New Haven—that's my native place."

Miriam Wallingford turned upon him a wild, frightened look at this, as if some sudden fear had been aroused in her mind—some dread lest some secret of her past might be in danger of being revealed.

"And I thought possibly that they might be relatives of yours," her companion went on, without appearing to notice her emotion.

"Possibly," she breathed, with what composure she could assume; "but—I was born in Rochester, New York."

"Well, about the boy," the man said, to turn the subject. "As I said before, a dollar and a half a week is rather poor pay for work of any kind, this hot weather, and, as I've taken quite a liking to the honest, little chap, I thought maybe I could give him a better chance, if you'd consent."

The gratified mother lifted a pair of gleaming, grateful eyes to him; but, without giving her an opportunity to speak, he went on to explain:

"I've an interest in one of the hotels down at Nantasket, and I heard the clerk making inquiries yesterday for a boy to act as office runner. The pay will be

two dollars a week and board; so, if you are willing to let him go, I can give Edward the chance."

Mrs. Wallingford's heart throbbed with mingled pleasure and pain at this attractive offer.

"It would be delightful for Ned to go to the seashore for the summer"—and she repressed a longing sigh as she thought of the cool breezes, the invigorating air and healthful bathing—while two dollars a week, besides his board, seemed a small fortune to her.

But how could she bear to part with her dear boy—the only real comfort and joy she had in the world? Then the influences of hotel life were not always of the best, and she feared to let him go into the midst of temptation alone. Still it seemed such a rare opportunity, that she hesitated about refusing it.

"More than that," the old gentleman resumed, as he searched her anxious face, which plainly portrayed her fears, "they also need some one to take charge of the linen room—to give out the linen as it is needed, see that everything is kept in order, and mended as it comes from the laundry. It occurred to me that if you felt strong enough to undertake it, the place might suit you, and you and the boy could go together."

How Miriam Wallingford's heart leaped at his words! She could hardly believe her ears. It seemed too good to be true—this opportunity to go to the seashore with Ned, where she felt sure there was new life and strength for her! To have her own and Ned's living provided for, and two dollars a week besides—she did not give a thought to any remuneration for her own services—and not be obliged to worry over rent,

that bugbear of all poverty-stricken people, while she would escape the worry and care of providing for their daily needs and the incessant toiling for a mere pittance upon those tiresome saccues. "Oh, sir, I am sure you are very kind to make us such a tempting offer," she began, gratefully.

"Then you'll go," he interrupted, as if anxious to escape her gratitude. "The pay for your services won't be much more than the boy's—three dollars a week; but maybe it'll do until you can find something better, and then it'll be worth something to get out of this broiling attic."

"I feel very thankful——"

"Tut, tut; that isn't the point at all," said the old man, hastily. "I told the clerk I'd fill the vacancies if I could, and let him know by telephone to-night, so you see it's got to be yes or no right away."

"Of course it will be yes—I could not refuse so kindly an offer; but you must let me say that I am very grateful for your kindness in thinking of us," Miriam Wallingford replied, with a certain impressive dignity and determination that would express her appreciation of his goodness. "I am far from strong—I was quite ill a few weeks ago, and began to fear that my health was failing; but I believe, if I can get to the seashore and be free from the care and anxiety which have pressed so heavily upon me during the last year, I shall begin at once to regain my strength; for, surely, the duties you have mentioned cannot be so very heavy."

"No. I reckon you won't be overworked, though you may find enough to keep you moderately busy."

"When shall we have to go?"

"Right away—as soon as possible."

"I suppose it would be hardly right for Ned to leave his place before the week is up," Mrs. Wallingford remarked, thoughtfully.

"No; if you can go by Monday it will be early enough, and that will give you plenty of time to get ready for the change."

Mrs. Wallingford glanced around the room, and wondered what she would do with her furniture.

"Let it remain where it is," said her companion, reading her thought.

Mrs. Wallingford smiled.

"That would be more than I could afford to do," she began.

"Let it remain, I tell you," he reiterated, authoritatively, "at least until you see how it suits you down at Nantasket. If the air should be too bracing, you couldn't stay. If you find you can, you can take a day, most any time, to come up to the city, and stow these things away and we won't say anything about the rent for a couple of weeks."

"You are very kind, sir; and Ned and I will be ready Monday morning," Miriam Wallingford said, heartily, though tears were standing in her eyes.

"All right; I'm going down on the first boat, and you can meet me at the wharf," the man responded, as he arose to go.

"Surely, sir, you will not go without telling me your name," Mrs. Wallingford said, smiling, as she arose.

"I should like to be able to tell Ned who our new friend is."

A kindly gleam shot into the old gentleman's eyes at her appreciative words and engaging manner.

"Benjamin Lawson, marm; beg pardon for forgetting to tell you before," he said, awkwardly.

"Thank you, Mr. Lawson. I am sure Ned will be very happy when I tell him of the pleasant change in store for him, while I cannot express to you the sense of relief you have given me in removing an oppressive burden from my heart."

"Glad to hear it, marm," said Mr. Lawson, but looking as if he felt very uncomfortable instead, for he was still struggling with a feeling of embarrassment; "but I must be off. Good-day—good-day," and he departed.

Mrs. Wallingford was assigned a room looking out as abruptly as he had come, while Miriam Wallingford sank back into her chair and sobbed out her thankfulness for the great boon which had been so unexpectedly sent her.

She had regained her accustomed composure when Ned came home from the store, while her face wore a happier look than he had seen upon it for a long time. Out of the fullness of her heart she had prepared a very tempting supper for him, and he stopped short upon entering the room, a look of unfeigned surprise on his bright face as he caught sight of the daintily spread table.

"Hulloa, Marmee! What's going to happen? It isn't anybody's birthday, is it? No—yours comes in January and mine in March. My! but it's a dandy sup-

per, though!—blackberries, chipped beef, rolls, and real milk! and you've made it look as pretty as a picture."

His mother laughed out musically, and enjoyed his pleasure most thoroughly.

"Yes, it is a birthday," she returned; "the birthday of Hope."

"Hope! Hope who?" Ned demanded, with a puzzled expression.

"Wash your face and hands, and brush your hair nicely, then I will tell you," she said, with a mysterious smile.

Ned hastened to obey, not only because his curiosity was aroused, but because his appetite was whetted to the keenest edge by the tempting array of viands before him.

When they were finally seated at the table, Mrs. Wallingford remarked:

"I have had a caller this afternoon, dear; I wonder if you can guess who it was?"

"I am sure I cannot, Marmee," Ned responded, "for I don't think we have any acquaintances who make calls, unless it is the agent, for the rent, and it isn't time for him yet."

"No; but my caller was a gentleman, and his name is Benjamin Lawson."

"Who is he?" Ned asked, with his mouth full of blackberries.

"Your queer old man, who lost his money."

"Great Scott! what did he want?" cried the boy, in unfeigned astonishment.

"Please, Ned, do not use slang," said his mother, reprovingly.

"He came to bring Hope to me," and then she explained the nature of Mr. Lawson's call; whereupon the boy bubbled over with delight.

"Isn't he just a 'Jim Dandy,' Marmee?" he cried. "Three cheers for Mr. Lawson! Hip! kip! hurrah!" and he waved his napkin wildly above his head, in a transport of joy. "It will be the nicest thing in the world for you, mother," he continued, when he had calmed down somewhat. "You have grown so white and thin of late, from that ugly pain in your side, and I'm sure the sea air will make you strong and well again. Oh! can we ever wait for Monday morning to come?" he concluded, with a sigh of anticipation.

"We have a great deal to do between now and Sunday," Mrs. Wallingford remarked. "I must finish my sacques, and look over our clothing, to see that it is in order; and Ned, I really think we can afford to get a new suit for you—your jacket and trousers are too badly worn to be presentable in a hotel, and you must have a pair of new shoes, too. Thanks to Mr. Lawson, your hat is all right."

"Don't you need something new, too?" asked Ned, thoughtful for her appearance as well as his own.

"A pair of gloves, perhaps. I shall not be so exposed about my duties as you will be, so what clothing I have will answer for the present."

And thus they chatted socially over their supper regarding the prospective change in their lives, happy in the anticipation of having nearly a whole summer by

the sea. They had craved it for years, and now it seemed almost like a fairy story to be emancipated from that hot attic, and have their wishes gratified.

Finally they arose from the table and Mrs. Wallingford busied herself about the dishes and some other duties, while Ned sat down to look over the morning paper, which one of the clerks at the store had given to him.

He read quietly for a half hour or more, when, all at once, he gave utterance to a cry of astonishment:

"I say, mother, here's a go!" he remarked.

"Well, dear, what is it? But you forget about using slang," Mrs. Wallingford returned, reproachfully.

"Yes, I do forget; but I hear so much of it, it comes before I know it," Ned said, flushing. "But the queerest thing has happened. I meant to tell you about it when I first came in, but your wonderful news put it entirely out of my head."

"It seems to me that queer things happen to you often of late," his mother responded, smiling.

"You have heard me speak of Bill Bunting," Ned said.

"Yes—you mean that rude boy who ill-treated you so a few weeks ago."

"Yes; he bullies all the boys—all the small ones—within an inch of their lives. Well, this morning, when I was going to the store, just as I was passing that empty lot that has a high board fence in front of it, I heard voices and a low growl behind it. Then some one said: 'Shut up, you blasted cur!' and I heard a blow, followed by a yelp, as if a dog had been hurt."

I stopped and peeped through a crack between the boards, and saw Bill Bunting and another boy. Bill had in his hand a string that was tied around the neck of the dearest little full-blooded pug in the world; he looked ever so much like the one that pretty girl had that Sunday—you remember; her father gave me the quarter.”

“Yes, I remember,” said Mrs. Wallingford.

“Well, I heard Bill say to the other boy, ‘You just keep mum about this, and I’ll go halves with you on the swag.’”

“What is ‘swag,’ Ned?” questioned his mother.

“What, it’s slang for money. Then he went on to say, ‘I’m going to take him down to Nat’s, to sell him in a few days, when they get through advertising for him, and he’ll give me something handsome for him.’”

“‘Better not let the perlice see yer,’ said the other boy.

“‘Ain’t yer green?’ said Bill; ‘that’s why I keep him tied up here and want yer t’ watch him when I’m off.’”

“‘Where d’ye keep him nights?’ the other boy asked.

“‘In that box down there in the corner—I’ve got some straw in it, and I bring him water and stuff to cat; but I have t’ do it on the sly for fear some one will catch on and blow on me.’”

“Oh, Ned! what language!” exclaimed Mrs. Wallingford.

“Well, mother, that’s the way those boys talk, only I haven’t repeated it half as bad as it was. I couldn’t stop to hear more, but I suspected that Bill Bunting had

stolen somebody's pet dog. I'm sure of it now, for here's an advertisement—just listen to it."

And turning again to his paper, Ned read aloud:

LOST OR STRAYED, ON MONDAY MORNING, A full-blooded Pug, handsomely marked, bright and intelligent, and answers to the name of Budge. When last seen by his owner he wore around his neck a blue ribbon, to which was attached three silver bells marked with the dog's name and place of residence. Any one giving reliable intelligence regarding the dog will be liberally rewarded.—Apply at No. — Summer street.

"That is the very dog I told you about, mother," Ned exclaimed, in great excitement; "it belongs to that pretty girl who gave me the rose. Bill Bunting has stolen it, and means to sell it; but I'll block his little game to-morrow morning, you see if I don't."

CHAPTER VI.

'I'LL JUST OWE YER ONE FER THIS.'

"It certainly does seem as if you are right in your suspicions, Ned—that the dog must belong to the little girl you mention," Mrs. Wallingford remarked, thoughtfully.

"I'm sure of it," Ned responded, confidently; "at any rate I know how I can find out," he concluded, with a bright look.

"How, dear?"

"The little girl called him 'My nice, clever old Budge,'" said the boy, trying to imitate the child's

peculiar inflection on the adjective, "and the dog was just tickled enough to jump out of his skin to have her praise him. I'm just going down to that lot after it gets dark, and see if I can't make him answer me when I say it."

"But, Ned, you know I do not like to have you on the street after dark," objected his mother.

"I won't be gone long, Marmee," he pleaded, "I will go straight there, and come straight back. I only want to just try the name; then, if it is Budge, I can go to Summer street and tell the gentleman early to-morrow morning. Please, mother, nothing can harm me and I do so want to do this for that nice little girl who was so pleasant to me."

Mrs. Wallingford could not withstand this plea, so she reluctantly consented, but charged him not to loiter on the street, and not to talk with people whom he might meet.

Ned promised that he would not, and about eight o'clock started forth on his errand. It was a warm night, and it seemed as if every house had been emptied of its occupants, who had congregated upon the steps and sidewalk to get the benefit of what little air there was stirring.

Ned avoided the various groups as much as possible, and made his way quickly as he could to that vacant lot which had the high board fence built across the front of it.

He found hardly any one just there, for it was rather a dark locality, and most people preferred to take the opposite and more cheerful sidewalk. He stopped at

the corner where he had heard the conversation regarding the dog and that morning, and, watching his opportunity when no one was near, he put his lips close to a crack in the fence, and called, in low tones:

“Budge! Budge!”

There was no answer or sound of any kind from the other side of the fence, and Ned began to fear that the dog had been removed from the box in the corner to some other quarters.

“Budge! Budge!” he repeated, and then there came to his eager ears a low, plaintive whine.

The boy’s heart gave a sudden bound of joy.

“I’ve found him—I’ve found him!” he murmured, in a suppressed tone of exultation.

But he resolved to make another test, and again putting his lips close to the crack, while he tried to imitate the voice of the dog’s mistress, he said:

“My nice, clever old Budge!”

In response to this there came two sharp, joyous barks, then a succession of plaintive whines, accompanied by a wild commotion, as if the dog was making frantic efforts to get out of his place of confinement.

Ned was sure now that his suspicions were correct, and he longed to climb over the fence, and release the unhappy little captive; but this he could not do, while even if he had been able to scale it, he might do more mischief than good by arousing Bill Bunting or his accomplice, who would, doubtless, spirit the dog away to a safer hiding-place. He knew that it would be better to wait until morning, and allow the owner and the proper authorities to take the matter in hand.

He thought it would not be best to say anything more to Budge, lest he should make a commotion and attract attention; so turning about he hurriedly retraced his steps, and a few minutes later entered his mother's presence, flushed and triumphant.

"I was right, Marmee," he cried, in clear, cheery tones, "the dog is Budge, for he nearly went wild when I called him. I shall ask the superintendent to let me off for a little while to-morrow morning, while I go to Summer street to tell the gentleman. Won't that nice little girl be glad to get her doggie back?"

"I'm sure she will, dear."

"It seems as if our luck has turned, doesn't it, mother?—so many good things are coming to us," Ned remarked, thoughtfully, after a moment of silence.

"What do you mean by 'luck,' Ned?" Mrs. Wallingford asked, in a gentle tone, while she bent an earnest, questioning look upon him.

"Well, I know what you mean, mother; you don't believe in luck or chance at all."

"No, dear; I believe that there is a kind and overruling Power that governs the life of every one," she reverently replied.

Ned flushed, and after a moment of hesitation asked:

"Do you believe it was a kind power that kept us poor so long, and let us go hungry and cold sometimes?"

Mrs. Wallingford smiled a little sadly, and thought a moment before replying. Then she said:

"You remember the fever you had two years ago, Ned?"

"Yes."

"And how hungry you were; how you begged for food, and I would not give it to you?"

"Y-es."

"Do you think I was lacking in kindness or care because I refused you?"

"No, Marmee, you were very patient with me, when I was cross as a bear, and you never left me—hardly long enough to get yourself anything to eat," Ned returned, seriously.

"Then you feel that I had wise reasons for using my power and authority in denying you, and you would feel that you could trust me again if you should be ill?"

"Yes, mother, and I begin to understand——"

"How I can trust the good Father above even though He has denied us many things which we have wanted," Mrs. Wallingford supplemented, as he did not finish his sentence.

Ned said nothing for a few moments, but at length he heaved a deep sigh, and remarked, with boyish earnestness and naivete:

"Well, at any rate, I'm glad He's let up on us a little, for it was pretty tough when we didn't have anything but mush and milk to eat. I think I've had a pretty good time, though, since I've been at White's, and now I'm too happy for anything to think we're both going to the seashore."

Mrs. Wallingford also felt as if the future were

opening a little brighter for them both, and a great burden was lifted from her own heart in view of the coming change.

An amused smile played about the corners of her mouth at Ned's characteristic remark regarding their recent trials, but she knew he did not mean to be irreverent, and she did not chide him. He had always been an exceptionally good boy, and as she gave him his good-night kiss she lifted a silent prayer that God would keep him as manly, and honest, and dutiful through life as he was then.

The next morning Ned was at his post promptly at eight o'clock, and a few minutes later he sought the "super," as he called him, and asked for a half-hour's leave of absence between nine and ten.

He showed him the advertisement which he had found in the paper, told him that he knew where the dog was, and wanted to restore it to its owner.

The man readily granted his request, and told him to take an hour if he needed it.

Consequently, at nine o'clock, Ned entered the great warehouse on Summer street, over the door of which he read "Wm. Langmaid & Co.," and approaching a clerk showed him the slip of paper which he had cut from the Herald, remarking:

"I know something about this, and I'd like to see the gentleman who advertised."

"All right; come this way," the man returned, and led him directly through the store to an office in the rear, where he saw the gentleman who had given him the quarter for unchecking his horses at the drinking

fountain, sitting at a desk reading the morning paper.

"Here's a boy who would like to see you, sir," said the clerk, by way of introducing Ned; then he went out, closing the door after him, leaving the boy in the presence of the wealthy merchant.

"Well, my boy, what can I do for you?" he inquired, in a genial tone, as he threw aside his paper, and turned with a smile to his youthful visitor.

"I've come to do something for you, sir," Ned responded, as he held the advertisement out to him. "It's about this—I think I know where the dog is."

"Well, well, that is good news, surely," Mr. Langmaid exclaimed, with a start and look of pleasure. "Where is he?"

"Shut up in a box, in a lot behind a high board fence on Harrison Avenue."

"How do you know that it is the dog named in my advertisement?"

"His name is Budge——"

"Yes," interposed Mr. Langmaid.

"Well, I called this dog by that name, and he whined and barked as if he knew it; besides, I've seen him," Ned explained.

"That may be, but how could you identify him as my dog, for I suppose his collar has been removed."

"Yes, sir; but I saw him once in your carriage; I'm the boy you gave the quarter to four Sundays ago for unchecking your horses—I'm Ned Wallingford."

For the second time the man started at the sound of that name, and bent an earnest glance upon the boy.

"True enough," he said, after a moment. "I re-

member you, and I thought when you came in that I had seen you before. Well, we must look into this matter. Can you take me directly to the place where the dog is confined?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who has him?"

"Bill Bunting, sir—that boy who came near knocking me down that Sunday."

"Aha! and I suppose you are not sorry to have this opportunity to get even with him, eh?" Mr. Langmaid remarked, as he bestowed a sharp look on Ned.

The boy colored crimson.

"Truly, sir, I had not thought of that," he said, earnestly. "I only thought how glad the little girl who gave the rose to me would be to get her pug dog back again."

The gentleman smiled genially.

"You are right; Gertrude will certainly be very much obliged to you; she has grieved herself nearly ill over the loss of Budge. But how did you happen to find out the whereabouts of his pugship?"

Ned related how he had been attracted by the sound of voices and the growling of a dog behind a high board fence, and how, peeping through a crack, he had thought it had a familiar look; then when he read the advertisement he felt sure the dog was Budge, and explained how, the evening previous, he had taken pains to prove it.

"Well, my boy, you have certainly done us a great favor, if this dog proves to be Budge, as I think he will," Mr. Langmaid said, as he pressed upon an elec-

tric button in the sheathing near him, and presently the same clerk who had ushered Ned in made his appearance.

"Will, just step out and bring a policeman here," he commanded, then making Ned sit down, he chatted in a most entertaining way with him until the man returned, accompanied by a guardian of the public peace.

Mr. Langmaid explained the nature of the business in hand, after which they all started forth to rescue Budge from "durance vile."

It did not take long to reach the place, but how to get behind that high board fence was a question.

Mr. Langmaid went to the corner indicated by Ned, and called, "Budge! Budge!" and the wild commotion which at once prevailed in the dog's prison-house, not to mention the pathetic whining and barking accompanying it, as he recognized his master's voice, plainly proved that Ned had made no mistake regarding his identity.

The policeman then went to the door of the building adjoining the lot, and rang the bell.

Both Ned and Mr. Langmaid were surprised when Bill Bunting himself answered it.

The boy grew pale upon beholding the policeman, but putting on a bold front, exclaimed, in a good-natured tone, as he glanced at Ned.

"Holloa, Ned! what's up now?"

"Is this the boy?" the officer inquired of Mr. Langmaid, and without giving Ned an opportunity to reply.

The gentleman nodded, and the policeman, laying his hand on Bill's shoulder, quietly remarked:

"We are looking for a dog that has been stolen. Know anything about him?"

Bill grew paler than before, and began to tremble visibly.

"No—no, sir. What dog—whose dog?" he stammered.

"You just take us around into that vacant lot, and we'll soon show you whose dog it is," was the stern reply, as the officer's grip tightened on the boy's arm.

"Oh, sir," he blubbered, now thoroughly frightened. "I didn't steal him—truly I didn't; I found him runnin' loose in the street, and I—I was only takin' care of him till I could find out who he belonged to."

"His name and street where he lived were on his collar, so you could not fail to know where to take him," said Mr. Langmaid, gravely.

"He didn't have no collar on, sir, when I found him," Bill whined.

"What is this?" inquired Mr. Langmaid, as, reaching forward, he seized the end of a blue ribbon that was just visible in the boy's pocket, and pulling it out exposed three tiny silver bells that were attached to it.

This was *prima facie* evidence of the boy's guilt, and realizing the fact, he hung his head, and began to sulk.

"Here is the dog's name and the street and number of his home," said Mr. Langmaid, showing the officer the engraving on the bells, "so it is only too evident that his intentions were dishonest."

"That's so. Now, then, you just take a beeline, and show us the way into that vacant lot," thundered the policeman, and the culprit seeing it would be of no use to try to continue to brave it out, turned and led the party down a flight of narrow stairs to the basement, thence through a cellar window into the open space referred to.

Close to the house, in one corner, there was a box about three feet square and as many high, with slats nailed across the front, between which the pug was visible. Poor Budge, for it was he, was in a sadly soiled and dilapidated condition. He was sitting close to the bars of his prison, looking forth with a patient mien, his saucy ears pricked up with a listening air, as if he realized that help was near.

The moment he caught sight of Mr. Langmaid his delight was excessive, and he began to bound and caper as well as his narrow quarters would permit, barking in the most joyous manner.

He was soon released, when his capers were so extravagant and amusing that Ned laughed aloud in boyish enjoyment of his antics.

He leaped upon Mr. Langmaid, licking his hands and manifesting his gratitude for restored liberty in a most pathetic manner, and when the gentleman held out his arms he sprang into them, and began to kiss his face with almost human affection.

"I guess there isn't much doubt about his belonging to you, sir," remarked the officer, who was hardly less amused than Ned. Then turning sternly to his pris-

oner, he inquired. "And now what have you to say for yourself?"

But the boy was sulky and obstinate, and would not answer.

"You'd better out with it; you'll fare better to confess the whole matter than to show any of your ugliness," the officer continued.

Still Bill would not reply, but stood looking upon the ground and digging his bare toes into the earth.

"Tell us where you found the dog and what you intended to do with him," Mr. Langmaid said, in a more kindly tone. "If you will tell the truth I shall be inclined to be more lenient with you."

"How'd you know I had him?" Bill rudely demanded, with a defiant air.

"That does not matter," said the gentleman, coldly. "I simply want to know how the dog came to be in your possession, and what you intended to do with him."

Instead of making any reply, Bill suddenly turned upon Ned.

"I'll bet you're at the bottom of this," he said fiercely. "I've seen yer skulkin' around here lately, and I'll just owe yer one fer this," he concluded, shaking his fist threateningly in Ned's face.

"Shut up, you young scamp! It'll be a good while before you'll pay it, I'm thinking. We'll have you housed at the Reformatory at Concord or aboard the schoolship before you know it," said the officer, with a scowl at him. "Now, will you tell the gentleman where you got the dog?"

"No, —— yer," angrily retorted the boy, who was now in a white heat of passion.

"Then, Mr. Officer, I will leave you to take care of him, and when you want me you will find me at No. — Summer street," said Mr. Langmaid. When, turning to Ned, he added: "Come, Edward, I want you to go back to the office with me."

With Budge still in his arms, he turned to leave the place, followed by his young companion, and a few minutes' brisk walk took them back to the office.

"Now, my boy," the merchant remarked, after he had deposited Budge on a comfortable cushion and dispatched a clerk to get him something to eat, "you have done me a good service to-day, now what can I do for you?"

"I do not want you to do anything, sir," Ned replied, with heightened color.

"But I offered a reward for information regarding the dog, and I feel that it would be neither fair nor honorable not to make my word good. I should be very happy to pay you five dollars, or more, if you think that would not be enough," and Mr. Langmaid drew forth a well-filled pocketbook as he spoke.

"Please do not, sir" Ned urged, looking really distressed at the thought of taking money for what he had done. "I do not want any reward—the little girl spoke so kindly to me that Sunday when she gave me the rose that I—I've been wishing ever since that I could do something for her."

Mr. Langmaid smiled at the boy's chivalrous spirit.

"I know that Gertrude will be very happy to have

Budge back again, and it is very good of you to wish to do her the favor; but really I think you must let me give you something."

"I thank you very much, Mr. Langmaid," Ned returned, with an assumption of dignity which would have been amusing had he not been so deeply in earnest, "but I should feel mean to take money for telling you about the pug—truly I should. I must go back to my work now, as my hour is nearly up. Good-by, sir; good-by, Budge," and before the astonished merchant fully realized his intention the boy had darted from the office, and in another minute from the store.

"Really, he is a fine little fellow; noble-minded and generous. Why didn't I think to ask him where he lives or works? Then I could have sent him some nice gift," the man mused, regretting exceedingly Ned's abrupt departure. "I wonder what he does; he is rather young to be working for his living. There is something strangely familiar about the youngster's face. Wallingford! I—I'm afraid he is something to that girl with whom Heatherton was so infatuated. Ugh!" with a restless shrug of his shoulders, "that is not a pleasant memory. Upon my word I wish I'd never had anything to do with it. Strange that college boys will get so reckless. Many a man has had cause, in after life, to regret the scrapes he has been led into—the 'wild oats' he has sown during his collegiate days," the man concluded, and then fell into a reverie that was anything but agreeable, judging from the regretful expressions on his face.

CHAPTER VII..

"I WILL CHOOSE NED FOR MY PARTNER."

Ned could, of course, understand that Mr. Langmaid would wish to pay the reward he had advertised, yet somehow he felt deeply hurt and annoyed to have been offered money for having been instrumental in restoring Budge to his little mistress.

"The idea of my taking money for finding her dog, when she was such a little lady to me! I guess not!" he soliloquized, holding his head very high, his eyes very bright, as he skipped across the street, where, after running a couple of blocks, he turned into Chauncy street, and never slackened his pace until he reached Bedford, where he darted in at the rear entrance to White's and in less than five minutes was busy about his accustomed duties.

At noon he told the superintendent that he was going to leave at the end of the week.

The man frankly expressed his regret at losing so honest and diligent a boy, and after conferring with a member of the firm, offered him a dollar more a week if he would remain.

But Ned told him that he was going to do even better that, while, for his mother's sake if not for his own, he felt that it would be best for him to go to the hotel at the beach.

The superintendent could not blame him for his

decision, but told him that if he should ever wish to return to the store he would be very glad to take him back.

Monday morning found Mrs. Wallingford and Ned at Bowes' wharf, in ample season to take the first boat for Nantasket.

Here they were met and cordially greeted by Mr. Lawson, who was ahead of them, and had been watching for them for nearly fifteen minutes.

Ned looked very neat and spruce in his cheap but nicely fitting suit, while Mrs. Wallingford appeared every inch the lady in spite of her simple dress of inferior brilliantine, her last year's bonnet, and lisle thread gloves.

She wore no widow's cap, no crape, only dead black, very plainly made; but her lovely face, so pale and fair, seemed like a pearl set in jet, while she looked very youthful, the old gentleman thought, and said to himself, that she must have been very young when she was—married.

Her beautiful eyes lighted with pleasure and gratitude the moment they fell upon him.

"I hoped nothing would prevent you from meeting us this morning," she remarked, after shaking hands with him, "for I have never been on any of these boats, and I am a little timid about traveling over strange routes."

"Never done much traveling, I suppose?" Mr. Lawson remarked, as he ran his keen eyes over her graceful figure, and noted the lady-like neatness and simplicity of her attire.

A vivid spot of color flamed in the lady's cheek at this remark, which was half a question, half an assertion.

"Not of late years," she quietly returned.

"Not since your husband died, I suppose. How long has he been dead?" Mr. Lawson inquired.

The vivid scarlet deepened, and Miriam Wallingford's eyes drooped as she replied, in a constrained tone:

"I—I lost him before Ned was born. Ned, dear, your tie has loosened. Come here, and let me arrange it for you."

She turned abruptly from the man's keen gaze, and busied herself reknitting Ned's pretty blue tie, while Mr. Lawson, still watching her curiously, noticed that the slender hands trembled over their work.

"Humph! that was rather a queer answer, I'm inclined to think," Mr. Lawson muttered, as he began to pace up and down the landing. "That woman has an interesting history, or I'm mistaken. Poor thing! she's had a struggle of it if she's had to work her own way ever since that baby was born. I'm afraid that my suspicions are true, and that that young scamp— Humph! well, I'll try to make the world a little easier for them both in the future; she's an amazing lady-like little body—pretty as a picture, too, or would be if she could only keep that color in her cheeks."

Presently he approached his charges again, and remarked:

"Well, marm, the gangway is open, and we may as well get comfortable seats while we can. Where's your trunk?" and he glanced about him, it having only just

then occurred to him that she might have some baggage.

"I have no trunk, Mr. Lawson," she answered. "Ned and I have all the clothing we shall need for the present in this extension," and she pointed to a new and capacious one that stood near them.

"Well, well, marm, there'll be precious few women at the fashionable —— House with as little luggage as that," he responded with a twinkle in his eye as he picked up the valise and led the way on board the boat.

The day was fine and the sail down the harbor was delightful, Mr. Lawson pointing out the various objects of interest, and relating the historical events associated with some of them.

Ned had never been on the ocean before, and the experience was an exciting one to him, while he exhibited all a boy's enthusiasm over what he saw—the ship-ping especially interesting him.

Upon their arrival at Nantasket, Mr. Lawson took a carriage for the hotel, where both Ned and his mother were soon installed in their respective positions.

Mrs. Wallingford was assigned a room looking out upon the sea, while Ned had a smaller one connecting with his mother's apartment.

The "linen room" was on the same floor, was both spacious and pleasant, with shelves and drawers on three sides, while a table, sewing machine, and a comfortable rocker occupied the fourth.

"Now, there ain't any need of your killing yourself," Mr. Lawson remarked, when he had conducted Miriam thither. "You're to have the whole charge of the

sheets, pillow-cases, towels, and table-linen; they're to be kept in order and handed out to the dining-room servants and chambermaids as they are needed. They must be looked over and mended as they come from the laundry, and there'll be some new articles to be made; but I guess you'll have plenty of time for some exercise out of doors and sea bathing, both of which I advise you to take, if you want to get strong and well."

"Thank you, Mr. Lawson," Mrs. Wallingford gratefully responded, for she saw that the old gentleman was interested in her welfare, and wanted to be kind to her; "I will do everything I can to improve my health, for I know I cannot discharge my duties faithfully unless I am well."

"That's the talk, but if, during a rush, the work gets ahead of you, just let me know, and you shall have help."

She thanked him again for his consideration, and then he left her begin her work.

Already she felt better than for a long time. The salt air was both refreshing and invigorating, and she seemed to be breathing in strength with every inspiration, while hope and courage were revived over the prospect of a permanent home for the summer and remunerative employment to enable her to lay by a little for the future, when the season should be at an end.

Ned was to be the office runner, and his bright face, alert manner, and manly, courteous bearing at once won him the good will of every one whom he served.

He dropped easily into his line of duty, and was so cheerful and good-natured in performing it that he

received many a "tip" from appreciative guests in the house.

All this he gave directly into the hands of his mother, who carefully invested them in one of the Boston banks as a nest-egg for him in the future.

He began at once to grow brown and hearty, his eyes were bright with health, his step elastic, and he was as happy as the day was long, while when he began to discover that his mother's thin cheeks were filling out and a dainty color to tinge them, his delight knew no bounds.

"Marmee," he said to her one day while his eyes dwelt fondly on her face, "you are getting as pretty as—as a young girl; do you know it?"

"Fie, Ned, you mustn't begin to practice flattery upon your mother," Mrs. Wallingford responded, an amused smile hovering about her lips.

"It isn't flattery, it's solid truth; you're a hundred times prettier than some of the fine ladies who are here," he stoutly affirmed, but she laughed out merrily, and told him to run away, for she was very busy.

But surprises and pleasures seemed to follow thickly upon each other. One day, as Ned was hurrying along a hall, intent upon some duty, he nearly ran over a bright little fairy, dressed all in blue and white, with a wealth of golden hair streaming over her plump shoulders, dainty bronze boots on her little feet, and knots of gleaming blue ribbon at the top of her sleeves.

"I beg pardon, miss," Ned said, with gallant politeness, as he brought himself up short, and doffed his cap; then, as a sharp bark and the tinkling of silver

bells fell upon his ears, a look of blank astonishment, followed by one of unfeigned delight, overspread his face as he recognized in the bewitching vision and her canine attendant Miss Gertrude Langmaid and her dog Budge.

"Oh!" exclaimed the little maiden, a smile of pleasure wreathing her red lips as she in turn recognized Ned, "you are Ned Wallingford, and the boy who found Budge for me!"

"Yes," Ned responded, flushing with joy because she remembered him; "but how did you know me?"

"I never forget anybody," asserted the pretty maid, with a confident toss of her bright head.

"I saw you out at that drinking fountain on Beacon street—don't you know?—and you told me that Budge was a full blooded pug."

"Yes; but I didn't suppose you'd ever think of it again," said Ned, modestly.

"Didn't you? well, Budge and I have a pretty good memory—haven't we, doggie?" responded Miss Gertrude as she fondly petted the silky head of her pet, "and we are ever so much obliged to you for giving us back to each other. Do you know," she added, confidentially, "I nearly cried my eyes out when I thought he was lost forever?"

Ned looked as if he thought it would be a great pity to spoil such lovely eyes, but he simply said:

"I'm sure you are welcome to all that I did, and I am very glad that I happened to run across him."

"Papa thought you were very independent, though,

not to take any reward," the child gravely remarked, as she studied Ned's frank, handsome face.

He flushed again.

"I couldn't," he said, "after he had been so kind, and—and you had given me that beautiful rose."

"What rose?" Gertrude inquired, wonderingly, then, as she suddenly remembered, she added, indifferently, "Oh! that was nothing. But are you stopping here at this house?" she inquired, with some curiosity.

"Yes, I am messenger boy for the clerk."

"Oh! Do you like it?"

"Yes, indeed; I think it is great fun, and I do so love the sea," and Ned glanced out of an open window where he could see the bright, sunlit waves as they came rolling in upon the rocks on the beach.

"But don't you get very tired?" Gertrude asked.

"Well, sometimes, but I get rested after a swim and a good night's sleep."

"Oh, can you swim?"

"Of course I can; can't you?"

"No; but papa said he would try to teach me this summer," Gertrude replied, with a little envious sigh over Ned's accomplishment, then after looking him gravely over for a moment, she remarked, "I think it is rather queer that you should happen to be here. We always come here for a month or two every summer. I think it is the nicest place I know of. Do you like to sail on the water?"

"Don't I?" Ned returned enthusiastically, "though I don't have a chance very often, I'm so busy."

"Papa has a yacht, and we go out very often; I will

ask him to take you with us some day. But perhaps you are in a hurry now, and I'll see you again about it," the child returned, as it suddenly occurred to her that she was keeping him a good while. "Good-by," she added; "say good-by to him, Budge, for he has been a good friend to you."

Budge responded to this command by a short, friendly bark and by trying to wag his tightly curled tail. Ned lifted his cap again as the blue and white fairy went skipping down the hall, and then went about his business with a sparkle of joy in his eyes and a bright smile on his lips.

Gertrude Langmaid was, in his estimation the prettiest and sweetest girl he had ever seen.

He knew that she was the petted daughter of a wealthy gentleman, while he was the son of a poor widow, and had to work for his living; but she was just as kind and friendly to him as if he had been the son of a millionaire, and he almost worshiped her for her sweet graciousness.

Later in the day Mr. Langmaid came into the office and shook hands cordially with him, while after that he lost no opportunity to give Ned an errand, and always "tipped" him liberally in return for his services.

Ned saw Gertrude every day after that first interview, and they became the best of friends. She never varied her kind and gracious manner, though Ned sometimes wondered if she would treat him the same in the presence of her own high-toned companions. At last she had an opportunity to prove herself the noble-hearted little lady that she was. Her eleventh birth-

day came around soon after her arrival at the hotel, and her father and mother arranged for a little reception and lawn party in honor of the event, with refreshments to be served in a tent which was erected in the spacious grounds for the occasion.

Ned was rather surprised and very much gratified to receive a printed invitation to the party, a mark of little Miss Langmaid's friendship and esteem which made his cheeks glow and his eyes sparkle with pleasure.

He showed it to the clerk, and was even more delighted when he told him that he should have the whole afternoon of the specified day to himself.

So at three o'clock on the tenth a merry company of boys and girls, about Gertrude's age, assembled on the lawn and piazza of the hotel, and entered most heartily into the various sports provided for them.

Ned enjoyed everything as thoroughly as any one, and soon made himself a favorite by his good-natured and obliging manner, and as his mother had taken pains to have him nicely dressed for the occasion, everybody, save those boarding at the hotel, supposed him to be the son of some guest in the house.

But all this amusement came near being spoiled about tea-time, when Gertrude and her mother, with two or three others, tried to arrange the order of marching into the tent for supper.

"There are ten boys and ten girls. I think we should go in couples," remarked a pert little miss, who was a small bundle of fashion and furbelows, and who liked to ape her elders in society matters.

"Well," said Mrs. Langmaid, smiling with amusement, "I see no objection to that, and you shall choose your own partners. Who will you go with, Katharine?"

"I'm sure I'm not going with that common errand-boy," the child returned, with another toss of her head and a disdainful glance toward the group on the lawn, where Ned was doing his best to make the others have a good time.

"What errand-boy?" chimed in a chorus of voices, for several others had approached, and were listening to arrangements while they bent surprised glances upon Katharine Montague, who was a guest in the hotel, and who had secretly resented Ned's being invited to the party.

"That Ned Wallingford," was the contemptuous reply; "he's—he's only an errand boy here in the hotel."

"Well," exclaimed Gertrude just here, her fair face crimsoning and her eyes flashing with indignation, "what if he is? he is just one of the nicest boys I ever knew, and you'll spoil everything, Kate Montague, if you do or say anything unkind to him," and tears rushed into the little maiden's eyes as she concluded this spirited defence of her friend.

"Yes," said Mrs. Langmaid, gravely, "Ned is a remarkably nice boy, and I should be very sorry to have his feelings hurt in any way simply because he is not the son of rich parents and has to work. I hope you will all be very careful."

"Mamma, I will choose Ned for my partner," Ger-

trude here spiritually announced; "I shall be proud to have him to go with me, for he is always so gentlemanly."

This independent championship quenched all further ill-natured remarks, for these little people were all familiar enough with the etiquette of polite society to know that whoever was chosen by the hostess as an escort had the post of honor, and it would not do to give offence by slighting him in any way.

Consequently Ned, who happily was in blissful ignorance of this little tiff regarding his position and social standing was made very happy when Gertrude, with shy, sweet graciousness, asked him if "he would be her partner, and take her in to supper."

He led the procession with her as proudly and with as much self-possession as if he had been accustomed all his life to such gallantries, while Gertrude confidentially informed her mother afterward that "there wasn't a boy at the table who was as handsome, gentlemanly, and attentive as Ned Wallingford."

CHAPTER VIII.

MIRIAM WALLINGFORD IS CONFRONTED BY A SPECTRE OF THE PAST.

But Miriam Wallingford had overheard the spirited discussion regarding the social standing and real worth of her boy, if Ned had not.

She had been sitting on the upper piazza, just where she could overlook the sports of the young people as she quietly worked at her mending and had thus been an unintentional listener to the debate.

Her fair face had flushed hotly as the pert little miss had spoken so slightly of the "common errand boy," and she bent eagerly forward to listen for the reply from Gertrude and her mother.

A sweet smile curved her delicate lips, when the true-hearted little maiden so nobly espoused the cause of her humble friend, and her glance rested gratefully upon Mrs. Langmaid, as she gently, but firmly objected to having his feelings hurt in any way.

She had never met the lady, neither had she yet seen Mr. Langmaid, but Gertrude she knew very well, for Ned frequently brought her to her rooms, and she and the attractive young girl had become firm friends.

Miriam was thankful that her duties did not bring her much in contact with the guests of the house; she rarely saw any of them except as she met them by chance, in passing through the halls about her duties, and it was a subject of wonder, among many of them, who the beautiful woman could be with that slight, graceful figure and a face of such delicate fairness and refinement.

Her work was of such a nature that she could always be daintily dressed, and though her costumes were very simple—usually of white or some pretty cambric dotted with a tiny sprig of black—she appeared like some cultured and high-bred lady, which indeed she really was.

But a cloud, aside from her poverty, over-shadowed her life—a cloud pressed so heavily upon her heart and spirit that she instinctively shrank from all society.

Mr. Lawson was the only one with whom she held anything like friendly intercourse. He was frequently at the hotel and always sought her to inquire, in a most kind and paternal way, “how she and Ned were getting along.”

He always seemed strangely pleased, too, with the improvement in her health and appearance, while it was plain to be seen that he was becoming exceedingly fond of Ned.

In her gratitude for the great kindness he had shown, in providing such a congenial home and employment for her and her boy, Miriam was very amiable and pleasant to him—except when he attempted to question her regarding her past, as he did upon one or two occasions; then she would suddenly withdraw within her shell, so to speak, assuming a proud though quiet reserve, which effectually baffled the old gentleman’s curiosity.

But to-day as she sat upon the piazza and realized the kindness and nobility of Mrs. Langmaid, she was instinctively drawn toward her and wished that she might know her better.

Then she smiled with amusement when she saw Ned with Gertrude on his arm, marching proudly into the tent, where he took his place at the head of the table beside his stanch little friend, without a thought, apparently, regarding the social difference in their positions. She was so glad that he had not been near

enough to hear the coarse remarks of that pert child, Katherine Montague, and thus could enjoy without a pang this, his first party and experience in social life.

"Oh, if I can but have my health and employment, so that I can give him the education I wish, I know he will rise in the world and eventually become the equal, if not the superior, of any of those petted children of fortune," she mused, as she continued to watch them during their banquet. "Ned is naturally smart," she continued. "I believe he will develop talent as he grows older, and I am sure he will become a man to be proud of in spite of——"

Her lips suddenly closed and thus shut back into her sad heart the thought to which she had so nearly given expression.

A little later she arose, and taking in her arms the pile of linen—upon which she had been at work—she went within the house to put it away.

As she was passing along the spacious hall leading to the linen-room, she saw a gentleman approaching her from the opposite direction.

She merely glanced at him, and would have passed on without a second look, had not a half-smothered exclamation of astonishment from him caused her to lift her eyes again to his face, when she suddenly became rooted to the spot where she stood.

Her limbs refused to move; every atom of color fled from her face; her heart beat like a sledge-hammer in her bosom; the roaring as of a great waterfall was in her ears.

The gentleman himself was scarcely less astonished and overcome.

For a moment he was rendered speechless, and appeared to be smitten with a terrible sense of guilt and consternation.

Then throwing out one hand, with a gesture indicating keenest pain, he questioned in a husky, hardly audible tone:

"Are you Miriam Wallingford?"

"You know that I am," she breathed; and then, her suddenly-smitten heart, unable to bear this cruel probing of an old wound, she sank, with a moan, in a heap upon the floor, scattering her pile of snowy linen all about her.

The man sprang forward to save her the fall, but only in season to receive her head upon his arm, thus preventing it from striking against the sharp casing of a door, with a force that would have bruised it terribly.

"Poor girl!" he muttered, as he saw that she had fainted. "I do not wonder that she was overcome; this meeting must have shocked her as much as it has me."

He gently lifted her from the floor, bore her into a small reception room near by and laid her upon a sofa there.

Then returning to the hall he gathered up the scattered linen and carried this also within the room, shutting the door after him to prevent any one from coming in.

He found the stricken woman beginning to revive and bringing her a glass of water he made her drink

some of it and was relieved to see that she was rapidly recovering her strength and consciousness.

"You are better?" he remarked, in a kindly tone.

"Yes, thank you," Miriam returned, and raised herself to a sitting posture, but with her great, pain-dilated eyes fixed, with a look of horror, upon her companion.

"Do not regard me so accusingly, I beg," he remarked, with visible agitation, "I know that I was guilty of a great wrong toward you years ago; but ah! I have repented of it in sackcloth and ashes, over and over again."

"Your repentance came rather late," Miriam Wallingford returned, with exceeding bitterness, while her face was ghastly in its pallor, "too late to prevent a terrible and lasting stigma from resting upon me and my boy."

"Ah! then Ned is your son!"

"Yes."

"Why do you call him by the name of Wallingford?"

"Can you ask?—why should I call him anything else?" was the almost passionate inquiry.

"But——"

"Do you imagine, for one moment, that I would allow my pure and noble boy to bear the name of the coward who deceived me—who wronged me in the most cruel manner that a woman can be wronged?" the pale woman cried, springing to her feet and confronting her companion with blazing eyes, a spot of vivid red burning on each cheek, while she was so bril-

liantly beautiful in her indignant excitement that her companion marveled.

"But, pray let me explain," the man began, appealingly, when she interrupted him again.

"Explain!" she repeated, with stinging scorn, but in a tone of agony which smote the listener like a lash, "How can you explain? What can you explain? Do you suppose that any explanation can undo the wrong of the past?"

"No; it cannot 'undo it' perhaps; but it may serve to mitigate it in a measure, if you will but listen to me," he replied, with gentle gravity.

"Oh! you do not know what you are talking about," the stricken woman cried sharply and with a dry, hard sob; "nothing can ever mitigate my condition and no one knows it better than you who helped to bring me where I am. Can anything give me back my care-free youth, my innocence and happiness? Can anything make me the guileless loved and honored girl I was when I first knew you?—restore my home, my parents, both of whom died of broken hearts? Can anything wipe out the torture of the last thirteen long years—the struggle with poverty, care and disease? Can anything give to my boy an honorable birthright and make him what a fond and loving mother would wish him to be? Ah! William Cunningham, you, perhaps, did not think when you aided and abetted such a fraud years ago that your sin would rise up to confront you at this late day of your life——"

"For Heaven's sake stop!" cried the man with white lips, his voice hoarse with suppressed feeling. "Every

word you utter is like a dagger in my heart. And why do you address me by the name of Cunningham!"

"Was not that the name by which your friend introduced you to me?"

"Sure enough he did!" he acknowledged as if but just then recalling the fact. "But did he never tell you that it was not my surname?"

"No."

"My name is William Cunningham Langmaid."

Mrs. Wallingford started and bent a searching look upon him.

"And you are—Gertrude's father?" she asked.

"Yes."

"The father of that sweet beautiful child!" the woman continued thoughtfully. "Suppose she should grow to womanhood only to be doomed to such a fate as mine."

"Heaven forbid!" cried the fond father sharply, a shudder of repulsion shaking him from head to toe.

"Suppose," Miriam went on, as if she had not noticed the exclamation, "that some man should win her love—her pure heart as Richard Heatherton won mine—for I was as pure and as well beloved by my parents as Gertrude is to-day. Suppose this man should have a friend who should assist him in deceiving her, as I was deceived, and her future happiness should be wrecked, as mine was wrecked, and she should be obliged to go through the world a heart-broken and deserted woman, burdened with a nameless babe to face a future of poverty alone——"

"For the love of Heaven cease! I cannot bear an-

other word," Mr. Langmaid cried with lips that were absolutely colorless, an expression of keenest agony in his eyes at the thought of his darling ever suffering such a possible fate as his companion had portrayed. "You have been deeply wronged, I admit," he continued, recovering himself after a moment; "I know that Heatherton planned to do a dastardly thing—I know that I did wrong in allowing him to draw me into it, and I have wished—many, many times—that I could meet you again, to ask you to pardon me for even appearing to sanction his act, and to explain how I happened to be a party to it. But I was young, wild and heedless, I thought only of fun and frolic at that time—never dreaming of his real intention; I too, Mrs. Wallingford, was deceived by him."

"You deceived?" repeated Miriam, in surprise. "In what way?"

"Sit down and let me tell you the whole story of that night's doings," Mr. Langmaid said, as he rolled forward an easy chair for his companion and asked her to be seated; then taking another opposite her, he resumed:

"On that night, when you became the victim of a great wrong, and only about ten minutes before we started, on what I supposed to be a frolic, Heatherton came to my room—you of course know that we were in the same class at college—and said that he and Mathews were going out into the country, a couple of miles, to the house of a farmer, where we should find two pretty girls all by themselves and ready for a frolic. The farmer and his wife had gone to New

York to attend some anniversary meetings connected with the denomination to which they belonged. He said they—he, Mathews and the girls—had planned to have a mock marriage, to be followed by a wedding supper and a jolly good time generally. Everything was to be carried out in first-class style; Miss Wallingford—the farmer's daughter—was to act as bride; her friend, Miss Arnold, as the bridesmaid; Mathews as best man; and, he added, 'we want you to go along as company for the parson, who is a friend of Mathews and has promised to do the thing up in shape.'

"I readily assented, believing that it was understood by all to be an out-and-out frolic, and that everything was just as Heatherton had represented; and when he added that he had provided a large hamper of good things, champagne included, the temptation was one not to be resisted.

"You know what followed—how, a few minutes after our arrival at your home, you appeared in your simple, but beautiful bridal robes, leaning on Heatherton's arm, and accompanied by Mathews and Miss Arnold. You know, too, how impressive Harris made the ceremony. I shall never forget how I was suddenly shocked into my manhood and better nature by the solemnity with which he conducted that service; he awed me, for of course I believed that it was all mockery. I realized, for the time how we were daring the wrath of Providence, by making light of such sacred things, and I resolved that I would never lend myself to anything of the kind again.

"But these impressions wore off somewhat, when,

later, we gathered around the temptingly spread table and gave ourselves up to feasting and hilarity. Everything was carried out to perfection; you made a charming bride—Heatherton was, apparently, the happiest of grooms—Harris a model of a parson; and no one, save those directly concerned in the affair, would have dreamed of such a thing as a mock marriage——”

“A mock marriage!” repeated Miriam Wallingford in an agonized tone; “it was the most sacred of ceremonies to me. I had not a suspicion, for months afterward, but that everything had been conducted in good faith—all the holiest feelings of my soul were stirred within me, as I breathed those vows which made me, as I believed, Richard Heatherton’s wife. Oh! how could you have lent yourself to such sacrilege?—and you believed that is was nothing more than a jest to me?”

“Yes—and yet——”

“It does not seem possible that you could have looked into my face and judged me so lost to a sense of all that was high and holy,” Miriam interrupted with quivering lips. “Oh! it was a terrible deception! Do not attempt to excuse it,” she went on wildly, as he opened his lips to speak again, “but listen while I tell you how I was led into the wretched trap. I first met Richard Heatherton at a fashionable party, given by an aunt who lived in New Haven, and who thought it might please her brother’s unsophisticated daughter to see something of the ways of high life in the city. I was a simple country girl, but I had been tenderly reared, well educated, although I had never been much

in society. Mr. Heatherton appeared to be attracted toward me from the moment of our introduction, showed me considerable attention at the time and upon various occasions afterward, while I gave him my whole heart at the very outset.

“We met frequently, during the next few weeks, and it was not long before he confessed his love for me and asked me if I would be his wife. I believed him to be sincere, and readily gave him my word to marry him. He wanted to be married at once and secretly, so he could not claim me openly, he said, until after his twenty-fifth birthday, when he expected to come into possession of a large amount of money, which some relative and his father had promised to settle upon him, if he did himself honor in college.

“At first I would not listen to such a proposition; I said wait until you are free to claim me publicly, then I will gladly be your wife. But he was very persistent; he would give me no peace, and every time we met he pleaded with me to go away with him and be married.

“At last I yielded to a certain extent. I told him firmly that I would never consent to an elopement—that if I was ever married, it must be in my father’s house, and everything conducted in a respectable and legal manner. This made him angry at first, at what he termed my lack of faith in him, but finally, upon being told of my parents’ proposed visit to New York, he planned the wedding you have described, and I consented that the marriage should be kept secret, until after his graduation and accession to the fortune he ex-

pected, when, he promised, he would own me before his family and the world.

"He played his game well—so well that it is not strange that I never suspected but that that ceremony was legal—or that I was not his lawful wife. I had always despised anything like deception or double-dealing, and it wore upon me, mentally and physically, to think how I had deceived my father and mother, whose lives were bound up in me. But I idolized my husband—as I believed Richard Heatherton to be—and so I cheerfully sacrificed myself to him. I told myself that his college course would soon be completed, he would soon attain his twenty-fifth birthday, then all would be well and my parents would forgive me, when they realized how happy I should be in my new relations.

"Richard Heatherton finished his college course—he passed his twenty-fifth birthday, and I confidentially expected that he would at once acknowledge me and give me my rightful position. I spoke of it several times, but he put me off with various excuses. But I had pride and spirit, and I insisted upon being owned as his wife. He tried to intimidate me with angry words and reproaches, but I was firm; I told him he must voluntarily do right by me or I would summon the witnesses to our marriage and compel him to it.

"Then he told me that I was no wife—that I had simply been his toy—his plaything, to help pass away some of the tedious hours of his college career.

"Can you conceive what such a statement meant to me? No; no man can ever understand how the sensi-

tive soul of a woman is rent and bruised and crushed, when she learn how she has been duped and tricked into pouring out all the tenderest and most sacred affections of her nature, only to have them trampled upon and mocked at, while she is spurned as a thing too vile to be tolerated by the man who has ruined her.

"It all came like a thunderbolt to me. At first I could not—I would not believe it; but when he mocked at my misery, then I knew it must be true. I raved and he only laughed at me. Then I fell upon my knees and pleaded with him—pleaded for my life, my happiness, my honor. I told him of the little one who would ere long come to claim his love and the heritage of his name, but his nature was adamant—his heart a stone—his God, himself. When I was assured of this and the uselessness of my entreaties I rose up, without another word of entreaty, and left him, vowing that I would never look on his face again.

"I left my home, my parents, all that was dear and pleasant to me, and went away and hid myself until my baby came to me and my strength returned; then I took up the burden of my life, with what courage I could, and tried to face the world single-handed and alone, but with a broken heart and every particle of hope utterly crushed out of my nature."

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. WALLINGFORD LEARNS SOME ASTONISHING NEWS.

Pen cannot portray the anguish that was written upon the face of that beautiful woman; the despair that shone from her eyes, that wailed through the tense tones of her naturally sweet voice; and William Langmaid felt both humiliated and condemned, as he looked upon her and listened to her, and realized that he had helped to doom her to the fate that she had described.

He had joined that "frolic"—or what he had at the time supposed to be merely a frolic—in a spirit of mischief and simply for the sake of having a "good time."

As he said, he had never once imagined or suspected, until it was too late to avert the evil results, that the affair had been anything but a mock marriage in the sight of every one, arranged just for a joke, and to give an occasion for merry making.

"And have you never seen Richard Heatherton since?" he asked, when Miriam paused in her recital.

"Never. Why should I wish to see a man who had wilfully crushed me—who had deliberately ruined my life?"

"Have you never heard from him?—did he never write to you, or offer to provide for you in your trouble?"

"Never; I should have returned his letter unopened, if he had written to me; I would have scorned any aid

he might have offered me," was the spirited response. "But I took good care that he and all who had ever known me should never find me, or learn anything about me. I blotted myself out of existence, as far as any connection with my old life and friends was concerned."

"Your father and mother——" began Mr. Langmaid, sorrowfully.

"Are both dead," she interposed with a sharp ring of pain in her tones and with white lips. "My father had a shock of paralysis the week following my flight and lived but a few days. My mother survived him and the shame of her only daughter less than three months."

"And Miss Arnold?"

"Is married; but I have never seen her since I left home. Mr. Mathews I met by chance on the street in New York one day about a year later. He recognized me and looked appalled, evidently at my changed appearance. He acted as if desirous to speak to me, but I waved him off and passed on. Your mock clergyman——"

"Oh, Mr.——"

"You need not try to offer anything in extenuation of his share in that affair," the injured woman interrupted passionately; "you reckless men ruined my life between you—you were instrumental in blighting the future of as noble a boy as ever lived, and there can be no excuse for any of you. I have done the best that I could for my darling—for he has been my one gleam of comfort amid all my misery, and in spite of my shame

and sorrow that I have doomed him to a nameless existence. Oh! why will girls be so foolish as to allow men to persuade them to deceive their parents, who are their best friends! Trouble is always sure to follow, and a man who will try to make a girl marry him secretly is not worthy of her love or confidence, and will certainly bring her to grief; if he is not honorable enough and does not love her enough to seek the consent of her relatives, and wed her publicly, he is not deserving—he will never make her a faithful husband.

“While Ned was a baby, I hired a nurse to take care of him while I taught in one of the public schools of New York city, as long as I was able, which was some six years, and we lived very comfortably until my health suddenly gave out. Then, of course, I was obliged to resign my position, and poverty began to pinch us with its gaunt and cruel fingers. I had saved something, for I had received a fair salary, but this was soon swallowed up by doctors’ bills and medicines; then I tried to do dressmaking, but, never having learned to fit after any approved method, I could not get work enough to support us, so I had to come down to shop-work, that device of greedy capitalists which saps the life and courage of so many thousands of helpless and unfortunate women every year—and finally drifted to Boston, where I had heard that the pittance paid for such work was not quite so meager. But poor living and hard work, together with an ever present anxiety regarding my boy’s future, were fast wearing me out, when Heaven sent me a kind friend, who

brought us both here to the seashore, where I have been rapidly regaining my health and strength.

"But, aside from my child; I care nothing for life," Miriam Wallingford continued, with exceeding bitterness, "all my own hopes were consumed to ashes more than thirteen years ago; and yet I want to live until Ned's principles are well grounded, until he can get a fair education and a good start in life; then I shall be glad to lay my burden down if the all-wise Father is willing.

"Now let me go," she said, rising, "I do not know why I have told you all this, unless the sight of one who participated in the ruin of my happiness has served to unlock the secret chambers of my heart to let you read the sequel to your night of 'frolic.' Ah!" she cried in a voice that stung her listener to the soul, "why is the world so cruel and unjust? Why are men allowed to go scot free when they sin so boldly and are so indifferent to consequences? Why does the world tolerate the wrecking of the lives of pure, innocent girls, and then receive their betrayers, with smiles and favor, upon the topmost wave of society, while their victims are spurned as too vile to cumber the earth? They should be branded with the mark of Cain," she continued, passionately, "for they are worse than murderers. You four college chums were no better; and yet to-day you all doubtless have wealth and influence and occupy high positions in society, while I—your victim——"

"Hush! oh pray cease these reproaches," Mr. Langmaid interposed, with visible emotion, for he was con-

science-smitten at the woman's wild despair, while her sad story aroused the keenest remorse over his share in the ruin of her life and hopes. "Do not judge me too harshly, but listen, while I tell you something."

"As I have already said," continued Mr. Langmaid, "I was shocked by the reckless trifling with such sacred things on that memorable evening. But I was even more shocked and dismayed when a few weeks later Mathews confided to me the bold thing which he had dared to do at that time. If you remember he was the gayest of us all—the life of the party, that night; but his gayety was all assumed to cover up a nervousness which he found it almost impossible to control. He was a wild, harum-scarum fellow, but he had the kindest heart in the world and never willfully caused any one a pang. Heatherton deceived us all, regarding his real intentions, for he represented to us that he was simply going out to your home for a frolic and that it was so understood by you and your friend. Mathews alone suspected that he was 'pulling the wool over our eyes;' that he also intended to deceive you and make you believe that he was going to make you his legal wife—that you were giving yourself to him in good faith, when in reality he was planning to make you his dupe and ruin your life."

"Just how Mathews became assured of this I did not know for some time after, as I will explain later, but he knew that you loved the man, that you had believed yourself his promised wife for a long time; he knew also that Heatherton would never marry any girl who did not occupy a social position equal to his own. He

did not dare to charge him with his suspicions, for he felt that if he was determined to ruin you he would accomplish eventually his purpose, if he did not that night. He could not bring himself to reveal his suspicions to you, for he could not prove them, and he knew you had the utmost faith in your lover; so he resolved upon a bold stroke, and, instead of curses and reproaches, Miriam Wallingford, you owe Albert Mathews your deepest gratitude, for it was through his innate honor and manliness and his reverence for womanhood that you were that night made a legal wife, instead of being allowed to become the dupe of an unprincipled man, and the ruined woman you afterward believed yourself to be."

The astonished woman seemed suddenly turned to stone, by this wonderful declaration, while she stood staring at her companion, a dazed, incredulous expression on her colorless face.

"What can you mean? Oh! do not make a miserable jest of my shame and wretchedness," she at length cried, in a hollow, almost unrecognizable voice.

"I am not jesting—Heaven knows that I am too much appalled by what you have told me, to speak lightly or frivolously now. I declare only the simple truth when I say that you were legally married to Richard Heatherton on that never-to-be-forgotten night; that you have every right in the world to bear his name, and to call his son by it," Mr. Langmaid solemnly affirmed.

Joy never kills, but it often paralyzes for the time being.

Miriam Wallingford swayed dizzily for a moment where she stood, then fell back into the chair, from which she had risen a few moments previous, where she fainted away for the second time that day.

"You poor, crushed and heart-broken woman!" cried William Langmaid, as he sprang again for a glass of water and vigorously sprinkled her face.

"What a wretch Heatherton was! What fools and knaves both Mathews and I were to be drawn into participating in any scheme so wicked. We both should have utterly refused to have had anything to do with it; and if Mathews had good reason for suspecting the truth, as it seems he had, he should have openly denounced Heatherton, or at least have warned Mr. Wallingford of his intentions."

But the fainting woman quickly recovered; the loss of consciousness had only been momentary, and she soon sat up, eager to learn more regarding the wonderful revelation which Mr. Langmaid had just disclosed, a new hope lighting her wan face and animating her heavy heart.

"Can it be true?" she murmured, with trembling lips, the light of a long-lost joy gleaming in her lovely eyes.

"Every word of it," solemnly affirmed her companion, "as I wil prove to you. Perhaps you know that Mathews, Heatherton and I were in the same class and completed our studies at the same time. We were all very busy during the last few weeks of the term, and I, at least, was too much engaged with my work to give a great deal of thought to that 'frolic,'

after it was over. I rallied Heatherton upon it once or twice, but he acted so strangely I fancied that he was somewhat ashamed of it, so I never referred to it again. I wondered what made him so moody and unsocial during the remainder of the term, but thought perhaps he also was studying hard to make up for lost time; but later I understood. Commencement passed, we each took our degree, and Heatherton immediately left New Haven, which surprised me, for he was a member of a number of societies, and I wondered that he did not remain to participate in the annual reunions. I had been at home about a month when one day, Mathews came to see me—we both lived in New York—looking as if he were in deep trouble.

“‘Langmaid,’ he said, ‘I have a confession to make to you.’

“‘All right; go ahead,’ I said, wondering what it could be.

“‘I’m afraid I have got myself into a duse of a scrape,’ he remarked, dejectly.

“‘How so?’ I inquired.

“‘Do you remember that frolic at Farmer Wallingford’s last February?’

“‘Yes, I briefly responded, but flushing over the remembrance.

“‘I—I suppose you never dreamed that it was anything but a—a farce?’ he said, hitching uneasily in his chair.

“‘No,’ but a great shock went through me at his words.

“ ‘Well, it wasn’t a farce—it was dead earnest in every particular.’

“ ‘What do you mean?’ I cried, aghast.

“ ‘Just this,’ Mathews replied; ‘I’ll begin at the beginning and tell you all about it. Heatherton had been making love to Miss Wallingford for months—just for the sake of a flirtation and to amuse himself while in New Haven—but she believed him to be honorable and sincere, and gave him her whole heart in return. He proposed a runaway marriage to her, but’—and here is where your story agrees in every particular with Mathews,” Mr. Langmaid interposed, “ ‘but she refused, saying that she must be married in her home, and before witnesses, or not at all.

“ ‘At first he was angry at what he termed her obstinacy, but he finally conceded the point, but stipulated that the union must be kept a secret from her family and his until he was through college. This she reluctantly agreed to; then it was that he came to me, representing that on a certain evening there were to be a frolic and a mock marriage at Farmer Wallingford’s—the old folks having gone away from home for a few days—and asked me to hunt up a fellow to read the ceremony over himself and Miss Wallingford, requesting also that I would officiate as groomsman, with Miss Arnold as bridesmaid. I didn’t feel quite easy for I had met Miss Wallingford several times, and believed her to be a fine girl. Indeed, I was surprised that she should be willing to lend herself to any such farce, for she had impressed me as being a person of too much character and principle, to be willing to bur-

lesque so sacred a subject as marriage; and somehow I imagined that "I smelled a rat" as the boys say. As luck would have it, I ran across her the very next day in one of the New Haven stores. She was buying tulle and white gloves. She greeted me quite cordially, but blushing as she saw that I noticed what she was purchasing. I smiled and ventured to remark: "Those are for Tuesday evening, I suppose." "Yes," she replied, in a low tone and coloring more vividly, "but please do not speak of it here. You are coming, Richard tells me," she added; "I hope we are not doing very wrong, but he assures me that there will be no need to keep the secret after June and commencement."

" 'You could have knocked me down with a wisp,' Mathews went on, 'I was so taken aback, for her words almost proved to me that Heatherton was deceiving the girl. I saw instantly that she believed she was really going to be married. I had a mind to face him at once and denounce him as a scoundrel, then refuse to have anything to do with the affair. Then I reasoned that such a course would do no real good, for if he was bound to carry out his infamous scheme, he would accomplish his purpose in some other way. Once, I thought that I would go to Miss Wallingford and reveal the whole plot to her; but I feared she would not believe me, and only hate me for meddling. But I did go to Miss Arnold, ostensibly to make arrangements for our part in the forthcoming wedding, and by adroit questioning got the whole story of Heatherton's courtship, the reasons why he wanted his marriage to remain a secret, as I have already related, together with

the arrangements which were being made for the wedding, thus proving beyond a doubt the correctness of my suspicions regarding his rascality.

“I never slept a wink that night, but revolving the matter in my mind and wondering what I could do to avert this great wrong. At last, in sheer desperation, I resolved to do a bold thing. As you know, Heatherton left it with me to find some one to act as parson. I meant to secure the services of a real parson. I had a friend who had recently been ordained, and settled over a little church in the country. I do not need to tell you it was Harris. I went to him, told him the whole story, asked him if he would take the place of the bogus parson, and really marry Heatherton and Miss Wallingford.

“‘At first he absolutely refused—he shrank from having anything to do with the affair. But I assured him that if he did not do as I wished, he would in a measure be responsible for a great wrong, as I was sure that Heatherton would stop at nothing to gain his point. I finally persuaded him, and he at last consented, though very reluctantly, to make one of our party and perform the ceremony, if I would be faithful in the performance of my duty and see that a proper certificate was in readiness. You know the rest—how everything was carried out, and how impressive Harris made that ceremony—ugh it gives me the shivers every time I think of it! and you know too that he left almost immediately afterward. He disapproved of the whole affair too thoroughly to remain and join in any gayety.’

"I did remember only too well, and I felt myself also shivering as I realized the enormity of the whole transaction," Mr. Langmaid remarked. "I felt greatly relieved, however, to know that a young and lovely girl had been saved from a fate so terrible as Heatherton had planned for her; while at the same time I could well imagine how wrathful he would be when he awoke to the fact that he had been caught in his own trap.

" 'Well, Mathews, you surely did a good thing for Miss Wallingford,' I remarked. 'But how did Heatherton take it? Not very kindly, I imagine, for he was looking rather glum and down at the mouth when he left New Haven.'

" 'That is why I have come to you to-day,' said Mathews, looking very crest-fallen. 'The fact of the case is, he doesn't know anything about it—he believes that he accomplished his purpose and I have never had the courage to tell him the truth.'

" 'You idiot!' I exclaimed aghast, 'didn't you know any better than that? You should have revealed the truth at once; you must write and tell him immediately.'

" 'He has gone abroad; he sailed this very morning.'

" 'And she with him?' I questioned.

" 'No; she left him a fortnight ago.'

" 'Left him!' I gasped.

" 'Yes; she insisted that he should acknowledge her as his wife; he flew into a passion and told her that she was no wife; that he had only been "fooling with her." There was a great scene, for, in her grief, she confessed everything to her parents; then in a fit of des-

peration she suddenly disappeared, and no one knows where she is. I met Miss Arnold in the street to-day and she told me about it. She had it from the Wallingfords.'

" 'Did you tell Miss Arnold the truth?'

" 'No; she did not give me a chance. She simply told me point blank facts, charged me with having been a party to an outrage of the most dastardly character, and denounced me in no gentle terms; then flounced away before I could recover my breath to say a word.'

" 'Then Heatherton does not know?'

" 'No.'

" 'You must write to him the truth immediately.'

" 'I suppose so, but he'll be mad enough to fight me, and his friends will be raving,' my much disturbed friend remarked, dejectedly.

" 'That doesn't signify—it must be done. You must obtain his address, tell him the whole story and make him understand that he must come home and acknowledge his wife at once,' I returned, sternly.

" 'I will,' he meekly promised, 'I will find out where a letter will reach him, and he shall not remain in ignorance of his true position a day longer than is necessary.'

" 'He arose as he spoke and left me, looking as if he felt nearly crushed by the weight upon his heart; while I assure you, Mrs. Wall—no, Mrs. Heatherton, for the name rightly belongs to you—a more wretched fellow than I was, did not breathe for the remainder of that day.'

CHAPTER X.

"I HATE HIM! I AM GLAD THAT HE IS DEAD!"

Miriam Wallingford was weeping quietly when Mr. Langmaid reached this point in his narrative.

But he knew that her tears would give relief to her overburdened heart, so he resumed his story, to give her time to recover her composure.

"Strange as it may seem, I have never seen Mathews from that day to this," he said; "but he was always an honorable fellow, even if he was thoughtless and wild at times, and I have no doubt that he kept his promise and did all that lay in his power to right matters, which he ought to have done before. That he failed, as far as you are concerned, is but too evident, though I had hoped that when Heatherton found that he was legally married to you, he would return, to make a home for you, and you would be reasonably happy together."

"And did you imagine that I would ever live with him as his wife, even if I had known that I was legally entitled to do it?" Miriam questioned, with great bitterness. "Never! It was enough to turn all my love to hate, all my respect to contempt, to learn that he had contemplated making me his victim. The discovery, merely, that that ceremony had been a legal one, could not have changed the fact of his intention to basely deceive me—that he had no real affection for me,

and simply wished to temporarily amuse himself at my expense. My king was uncrowned and dethroned; my lover became a villain and a brute, in my estimation, when he told me how he had duped me into a mock marriage; and had he then offered me honorable marriage, I would have rejected it with contempt. That sacred rite means something more to me than a mere name and home; it means the harmonious and solemn union of two hearts and lives, out of which other lives, perhaps, may spring into being to be trained for God and some noble life-work. No such union could have resulted from a marriage between Richard Heatherton and me; so I am glad that I have lived as I have, rather than that my boy should have grown up under the influence of such a heartless father. Ned would have quick to detect his lack of principle, his selfishness and shallowness, and to feel only contempt for him; while I have at least secured his love and respect, even if I have not—as until now I have believed—been able to give him an honorable birthright.”

Mr. Langmaid marveled, as he gazed upon the woman’s expressive and beautiful face, while she gave utterance to these high moral sentiments, which were born of a refined and sensitively organized nature, and he thought it was indeed well that she had escaped the contamination of living with such a man as Richard Heatherton.

“You are a noble woman!” he exclaimed, with hearty sincerity, “and I do not wonder that Ned is a boy to be proud of; he must, I think, have inherited the virtues of his mother, without the vices of his father.”

"Thank you," his companion responded, with a faint smile, and a flash of pride in her eyes for this praise of Ned, "and believe me, Mr. Langmaid, I am very grateful to you for the new hope and courage with which your revelation has inspired me, while I trust you will forgive me for the hard things I said at the beginning of our interview."

"You were certainly excusable," Mr. Langmaid gravely replied; "and may I hope that you will forgive me for my share in that unhappy affair of thirteen years ago?"

"Most assuredly—or rather let me say that I have nothing to forgive, since you were also deceived regarding the nature of it. And now," she added, with more energy and brightness than he had yet seen her exhibit, "I feel as if I could live once more! There is no stigma resting upon either Ned or me; the only thing for which I need to grieve is that I did not confide in my father and mother—that my disobedience broke their hearts and doomed them to an untimely death. But, Mr. Langmaid," she added, suddenly, "can I have proof absolute—in black and white—of my marriage?"

"I think so," the gentleman responded. "Mr. Harris is still living—he is Dr. Harris now, and pastor of a flourishing church in Chicago. I will write and ask him to send you such proof, if you wish, and I will also add my signature to whatever he may send, to testify that I was a witness of your marriage."

"Thank you; I shall be grateful if you will do so."

"I wonder whatever became of the certificate. Do

you suppose it was given to Heatherton, and that he destroyed it?" Mr. Langmaid thoughtfully asked.

"I do not know—I never saw it, if there was one," Miriam replied. "I once asked him about it, but he evaded me, and I scarcely gave the subject a thought afterward, my confidence in him was so great."

"Is it your intention to take the name of Heatherton?" her companion inquired, with some curiosity.

"Yes," was the ready and decided answer, "for Ned's sake. It rightly belongs to us—it is a good name, despite his father's lack of principle, and I am sure that he will some day do honor to it. I wonder if Mr. Heatherton's parents are still living," she concluded, musingly.

"I am unable to tell you," Mr. Langmaid replied. "I think it probable, however, for I saw the father once when he visited his son at New Haven, and he appeared like a hale and hearty gentleman. He was a man of abundant means, too."

"I have no desire to possess any of his money, neither would I force myself upon the family—or claim aught from them," said Miriam, flushing. "Indeed, I would accept nothing from people who are so proud that their son dared not present his wife to them, because, socially, she was not their equal. I simply wish to send them, if they are living, a copy of whatever Dr. Harris may give me, that they may know their son was legally married. Do you know," she continued, with a sudden start, and paling a little, "whether Richard Heatherton has ever returned from abroad?"

"I do not think he has," said Mr. Langmaid, gravely,

“for I heard, about two years later, that he was dead, though I have never been able to learn the particulars.”

The gentleman was sure that he heard a sigh of relief at this intelligence, while a moment later Miriam Wallingford arose and turned a very bright face toward him.

“I must go back to my duties,” she said, with a ring of energy in her tone that he had not heard before. “But let me thank you again for the fresh courage and hope which you have put into my heart to-day; I feel like a new creature.”

“I am only too grateful to have been instrumental in lightening your burdens, if ever so little,” he returned, with emotion. Then he added, as extended his hand to her: “And, Mrs. Heatherton, may I presume to ask if you will regard me as a friend from this time on?”

“Thank you; I shall be only too glad to do so,” Miriam smilingly replied, as she laid her delicate, lady-like hand in his.

“And if I can ever be of any assistance to you—if I can at any time, or in any way, advise or help you in the future regarding Ned, pray command me,” Mr. Langmaid added, with hearty earnestness.

“You are very kind, and I gladly promise to consult you should occasion require. We also have a very good friend in Mr. Lawson,” his companion replied.

“Ah! he’s a queer old gentleman,” said Mr. Langmaid, with a laugh, “but kind-hearted, in spite of his brusque ways. He owns most of this hotel, I understand; he’s very keen and looks after business with a shrewdness that few men possess. I think he is worth

a great deal of money. By the way," the gentleman added, with a sudden thought, "have you met Mrs. Langmaid since we came here?"

"No, I have not—I meet very few people, excepting the servants, for I, myself, am only a domestic in the house," Miriam frankly explained, but with heightened color.

"You are a lady, whatever your position, Mrs. Heatherton, and I know that my wife will be glad to make your acquaintance. I shall see that she does so, right soon, too," Mr. Langmaid said with a friendly smile.

He politely opened the door for her to pass out, bidding her a kind "good-afternoon;" and Miriam Wallingford-Heatherton went to her own room, her heart lighter than it had been for thirteen long years.

There had been magic in those few words—"a legal wife;" they had given her hope and strength and courage.

Life was changed! Instead of being a dreary existence, through which she must drag her burden of sorrow and shame, with the feeling that only death could release her from it, the world had suddenly grown brighter to her; she could look forward to the future with anticipations of pleasure for both herself and Ned.

She no longer had reason to hide herself and shrink from meeting people, for she was, and always had been, an honorable wife, her boy had a right to bear his father's name, and henceforth, no matter how poor they might be, or how hard they might have to work,

no one could question their respectability. It was such a relief—such a joy to her long-burdened heart.

When Ned came to her, after the party was over, he wondered what had made her eyes so bright—what could have given her such a lovely color in her cheeks, and why her smile was so much sunnier and sweeter than usual.

“Oh, mother, how nice you do look in that fresh white dress!” he exclaimed, as he slipped his arm about her neck, and kissed her glowing cheek. “I believe you are growing prettier every day. It must be the salt air—and this is just the jolliest place in the world to live in, isn’t it?”

“It certainly is very pleasant here, and I am sure that you have enjoyed yourself this afternoon,” Miriam fondly returned, as she looked into his bright face.

She had resolved not to tell him anything about her interview with Mr. Langmaid, or of his revelations to her, until she should receive some tangible proof of her marriage, from the Rev. Dr. Harris.

“Indeed I have,” Ned responded, heartily, “and I was treated just as handsomely as anybody, if I am only an errand boy in the hotel,” he added, in blissful ignorance of the little word-battle regarding his position, which his mother had overheard.

She smiled as she recalled it.

“An ‘errand boy’ may be just as honorable and respectable as the son of a king,” she responded.

“I know it; but all people do not act as if they thought so,” Ned rejoined, flushing slightly over the

remembrance of certain slights which he had to bear occasionally.

"That doesn't alter the fact, dear," Miriam gently replied; "and Ned," she gravely continued, "I do not wish you to feel that mere position can either elevate or degrade you, for if you strive to be an honest, noble minded boy, in an humble position, you will be an honest, noble-minded man if you should ever rise to wealth and eminence; and I'd rather you would be that than the richest man in the United States without principle."

"Yes, I believe I'd rather be good and respectable than rich myself," Ned thoughtfully remarked. "But one may be both, I suppose—at any rate I'm going to try for it, and when I do make my fortune you shall have silk and diamonds like Mrs. Langmaid," he proudly concluded.

"I have one priceless diamond now," said his mother, smiling.

"Where!" Ned asked, looking astonished.

"Right here," was the playful response, as she kissed him on the lips and then laughed musically, as he flushed with pleasure over her fond words.

"Why, Marmee, I really believe you are getting jolly and happy as well as pretty and strong," he cried, regarding her affectionately.

She laughed again, then told him he must run away to the office, while she put away her pile of linen before supper, after which they would go for a walk on the beach.

The next morning Gertrude brought her mother to

Mrs. Heatherton's room, and Mrs. Langmaid, having learned something of the unfortunate history from her husband, was prepared to take her right into her kind heart.

She found that she was, as Mr. Langmaid had told her, a lady in every sense of the word; she could but acknowledge to herself, there were few in the world more beautiful and attractive.

They had a pleasant interview, for Mrs. Langmaid was very unassuming and friendly, and Miriam, who had shunned all society for so long, began to feel that it would be exceedingly delightful to have the acquaintance of a refined and cultivated woman once more.

Late on Saturday afternoon, four days after her interview with Mr. Langmaid, that gentleman tapped upon the door of the linen-room, and when Miriam opened it he handed her an official-looking envelope, simply remarking, with a smile:

"I trust you will find in this something to cheer you."

Then he went away, leaving her to open the envelope by herself.

The woman's delicate fingers trembled as she broke the seal and drew forth the contents, and a low exclamation of joy escaped her as she unfolded it and found it to be the original certificate of her marriage, signed by Dr. Harris, the clergyman who had performed the ceremony, and "William K. Mathews," as witness.

There was also a letter explaining how the gentle-

man happened to have the document in his possession at this late date.

Knowing the circumstances regarding the so-called "mock-marriage" (he wrote), he had not thought it best to give the certificate to either Mr. Heatherton or his bride at that time, but had intended to send it to them later, to avoid the scene, which he felt sure must ensue when Mr. Heatherton should discover that he had been legally married by a clergyman.

Unfortunately, however, he had mislaid the document upon his return home that evening, and it did not come to light again for several months, when Mr. Heatherton had left college and gone abroad, and he was unable to obtain his address. A long time afterward he had learned from Mr. Mathews the sad results of that night's work, and he had bitterly reproached himself for having allowed himself to have anything to do with the affair. He requested Mr. Mathews to sign the document, to show that he had been a witness, and thus make the proof doubly sure, if Mrs. Heatherton could ever be found and should need it. He was very glad to be able to do her justice, even at this late day, and regretted, more than he could express, the sorrow and suffering she had endured during the last thirteen years. He requested that Mr. Langmaid would also sign the certificate, as another witness, before giving it to Mrs. Heatherton.

This he had done, and now no one could ever question the legality of the ceremony which had made her Richard Heatherton's wife.

The letter was most kind and sympathetic, and there

were tears of gratitude in Miriam Heatherton's eyes as she read it, and a song of praise in her heart for this justification, even though it had come to her so late.

That night she told Ned the sad story of her life—of her wrongs, her sufferings, and why she had always called him by her maiden name, instead of giving him his father's.

Ned listened to the pathetic recital with a flushed and downcast face, but when his mother concluded he looked up into his eyes and fiercely exclaimed:

"I hate him—that man. I am glad I have never known him! I am glad that he is dead!"

His mother was startled by the passionate ring in his tone.

"I do not wish you to cherish hate in your heart against any one, Ned," she said, in a tone of gentle reproof. "I cannot ask you to respect your father's memory, for I have no respect for him myself; but, since he is gone, we will not 'hate,' but simply ignore him altogether, and try to be as happy as we can in each other, for the future."

"This is why you have always been so unhappy, dear mother?" Ned asked, his face softening to an expression of wistful regret.

"Yes, dear; the past has been full of wretchedness for me, because of my supposed questionable position, and because of the stigma which I believed must always rest upon you."

"It was too bad—a shame but—but, will you try to be happy now?" Ned asked, with tears in his eyes.

"I am very happy now, dear," she answered, tenderly.

"And I will make you more so," he said, eagerly. "You shall never be unhappy about me. I promise that I will never do anything to make you ashamed of me, and I mean, some time, that you shall be very proud of me."

"You have always been a great comfort to me, Ned, and you grow more and more so," she answered, kissing him; then she added, flushing slightly: "But I want to talk with you a little about our name. I think it will be best for us to take the name of Heatherton."

"I hate the name!" Ned broke forth, impetuously.

"It is a very good name—one that has been highly respected, and you must not condemn it simply because one person has dishonored it," said his mother, gravely. "I think there are several reasons why it will be better for us to be known by the name that rightly belongs to us.

"Well, I suppose you are right—you always are," Ned thoughtfully remarked, "but please do not make any change while we are here this summer—it would cause so much talk. Let us wait until we go back to Boston, in the fall, then, if you think best, we will take the name of Heatherton."

Mrs. Heatherton agreed with him that it would be well to wait, and thus the matter was left for the present.

CHAPTER XI.

A SURPRISE PARTY IS MADE FOR NED.

One morning about a week after the birthday party, Ned was sent down to the boat-landing upon an errand of some kind.

Having waited until the boat had discharged her passengers and cargo, he transacted his business and then started back toward the hotel.

As he approached the house he noticed a strange dog running along ahead of him with his nose to the ground, and behaving rather queerly.

But, unsuspecting of any danger, he did not pay much attention to him, until, just as he was about to cross the croquet ground, which lay between him and the veranda, he heard a wild shriek and, looking up, he saw one of the little girls who boarded at the hotel, bounding toward the piazza, the dog following close upon her heels, frothing at the mouth, his tongue protruding, his eyes glowing like coals of fire.

"He is mad!" cried Ned, growing white as his collar, while his heart leaped into his throat with terror as he realized the child's danger.

"That is little Nellie Trafton," he panted. "Oh! she must not be bitten! What shall I do?"

He did not have a thought regarding his own safety—he was only intent upon devising deliverance for the

sweet little girl, whom every one loved, as he hurried onward.

But just at that moment he heard the voice of some one calling in an encouraging tone:

“Come on, little one—faster! faster! the dog shall not hurt you.”

Then Ned saw Mr. Lawson spring from the veranda, clearing the low railing at a single bound, as if he had been but twenty instead of sixty, and flourishing his cane vigorously, as he advanced straight toward the rabid animal.

This, of course, turned the dog's attention toward him, giving opportunity for the child to spring up the steps, out of harm's way, where she was received in the arms of her frightened father, who folded her close to his breast with a cry of thankfulness for her safety.

But Ned was scarcely less distressed now on account of the danger of his kind friend, who was still approaching the dog, his cane extended directly before him.

The animal, having been balked of more helpless prey, was now furious, and, snarling and barking in the most vicious manner, prepared to pounce upon the child's heroic deliverer.

The man, watching every movement of the dog, waited until the creature made a spring toward him, when he dextrously thrust his cane into his mouth, jamming it down his throat with almost superhuman strength, and throwing him to the ground, where he held him pinned, but writhing in horrible contortions

and agonies, while blood and froth poured copiously from his mouth.

His struggles were fearful—his strength something tremendous and the terror-stricken guests upon the hotel piazza could plainly see that the contest was a very unequal one, and, unless help soon came to him, Mr. Lawson had very little to hope for.

“Has no one a pistol or revolver?” Mr. Langmaid demanded, with pale lips.

But no one had such a weapon at hand; and, with a cry of impatience, he bounded into the house and up to his own room to bring one.

But help for Mr. Lawson was nearer than that.

Ned’s bright eyes had espied, lying near, one of the heavy croquet mallets used by the young men of the house.

Three bounds, and it was in his hands, when, with flying leaps, he sprang straight toward Mr. Lawson.

“Back! back!” cried the old man, hoarsely, as he saw the brave boy, and realized his intention. “Go back, boy, or you surely will be bitten.”

But Ned, with uplifted mallet and resolute face—though he could not have been whiter if he had been dead, paid no heed to his words.

“Hold him just one minute longer, and I’ll finish him!” he shouted, and the next instant the mallet descended with a vigorous stroke upon the struggling creature’s head.

He gave a bowl of agony and kicked convulsively. But not for long; another sure and powerful blow, from the terror-nerved arm of the brave boy, fell di-

rectly between his eyes and the dog rolled over and stiffened out—dead, just as Mr. Langmaid reappeared upon the veranda, a cocked revolver in his hand.

“Thank the Lord!” fervently ejaculated Benjamin Lawson, who was scarcely less pale and unnerved than the brave boy who had rendered him such timely assistance.

He released his hold upon his cane, which still remained in the mouth of the dead dog, slipped his arm around Ned’s shoulders, and led him toward the house.

Both were so overcome by the terrible excitement of their recent adventure, and the reaction which now followed, that they could scarcely walk from the trembling in their limbs; but friendly hands were put forth to help them upon the veranda, where they sank exhausted into the chairs placed to receive them.

“Brave boy! brave boy!” murmured Mr. Lawson, weakly, and nodding approbation to Ned, as he wiped with a shaking hand the perspiration from his own brow.

But Ned was too spent to do more than smile faintly in reply, though he was somewhat refreshed after drinking a glass of water which the clerk brought to him.

The guests of the house gathered around the two heroes, with various expressions of sympathy, admiration, and thankfulness for their almost miraculous escape; while the father and mother of little Nellie Trafton, who had witnessed the whole transaction, were too much overcome for speech, and could only look

the gratitude they experienced for the heroes who had saved their darling from a frightful death.

The news of the terrible encounter had flown like wild-fire throughout the hotel, finally reaching the ears of Mrs. Heatherton, who, with sinking heart and trembling steps, sped down to the veranda to learn the worst regarding her idolized boy.

"Ned! Ned!" she cried, in a voice of agony, as she saw him sitting so pale and spent in the midst of that awe-stricken group. "Oh! tell me that you are not bitten!" and a slender, white-clad figure glided through the crowd to his side, and a pair of trembling arms were thrown about him, while Miriam Heatherton searched his face with wild, eager eyes, utterly oblivious of the fact that the gaze of a hundred people was riveted upon her.

"No, mother—do not look so frightened. I am all right," Ned cheerily responded, his mother's terrified tones doing more to restore him to himself than anything else. "I haven't even a scratch," he added, as he saw she did not half credit what he said.

"Are you sure?—oh! don't deceive me, dear, for if you are wounded you must have treatment at once," was the anxious appeal.

"I am very sure, for the dog didn't touch me," Ned positively affirmed. "Mr. Lawson was in the most danger. I hope you are not hurt, sir," he concluded, turning to his friend.

"Not a bit, youngster; I should have been though but for you. I couldn't have held him a minute longer;

he had the strength of a lion. I believe that you have saved my life, and perhaps that of others also."

"That is so! Yes, indeed! He's a noble little fellow! There are not many boys of his age who would have gone to the rescue as he did," were some of the numerous comments in reply to Mr. Lawson's assertion.

"I'm sure I don't think I did anything to make a fuss over. I only gave him a couple of blows with a mallet. Mr. Lawson's the one who faced the music with a bold front," Ned modestly observed. Then, rising to escape from the embarrassment of further commendation, he added:

"Come, mother, I've burst a button-hole in my collar, and I wish you'd mend it for me."

Mother and son quietly withdrew from the crowd; but if they were out of sight they were not out of mind, for they were the subjects of much comment and curiosity during the remainder of the day.

Ned was a veritable hero in the estimation of every one, for all realized that but for his brave attack upon the rabid dog, Mr. Lawson and possibly others, as he had said, would have been badly bitten.

No one depreciated the old gentleman's courage and self-sacrifice in going to the rescue of little Nellie Trafton—he was given his full share of praise, while Mr. and Mrs. Trafton, when they found voice, were profuse in their expressions of gratitude to him.

But for Ned, who was so youthful, and who acted so promptly and efficiently, every one seemed to have a peculiar tenderness and admiration.

Beyond that one outburst "Brave boy! brave boy!" and "I believe you have saved my life," Mr. Lawson said nothing to him; whenever he met him, during the next few days, his lips would tremble, tears would spring to his eyes, then he would pat him softly on the shoulder and go away to recover his composure.

"We must do something for that boy," the guests began to whisper among themselves a few days later. "We must not allow such an act to pass without some substantial expression of appreciation and good-will."

"What shall we do? He is a poor boy—a purse of money would doubtless be accepted," suggested one.

Mr. Lawson overheard the remark, and turned sharply upon the speaker.

"Yes, he's a poor boy, but he shall never want for anything after this. Don't give him money, though, for such a deed—give him something to keep—something that will be proud to show as a testimonial of your appreciation of what he has done. Give him a watch."

This proposal was received with applause, and a paper was at once circulated for subscriptions for the time-piece.

Mr. Trafton headed the list with a generous amount, and every gentleman in the hotel contributed most cheerfully.

All save Mr. Lawson, who refused to put his name to the paper, but remarked that he'd "like to be one of the committee appointed to purchase the watch."

This request was readily granted, and Mr. Trafton,

together with Mr. Langmaid, having been chosen to assist in making the selection, it was arranged that the purchase should be made that very afternoon.

This was on Tuesday. Thursday afternoon Ned noticed that there seemed to be a good deal of whispering going on among the young people of the house, while some of the older ones also appeared to have something more than usually interesting upon their minds.

Everybody was peculiarly gracious to him. The gentlemen chatted and joked with him; the ladies smiled upon and petted him, while the children looked mysterious whenever they met him.

He thought it was rather strange, but did not attach any special importance to it.

He was kept quite busy in the office all the afternoon, thus he knew nothing of the work of art that was being arranged in the grand drawing-rooms—the doors of which were kept locked—by some of the ladies, and a florist engaged for the occasion.

When he went up to his mother's room at tea-time—they always had their meals together—he wandered what made her look so smiling and happy, and why she kept flashing such fond, delightful glances at him.

He noticed, too, that she was more carefully dressed than usual in a pretty new black lace, with soft delicate ruffles at her neck and wrists, while her hair was arranged with great nicety.

He thought he understood it all, however, when she remarked, just as he arose from the table:

“Ned, I want you to put on clean linen, brush your

hair nicely, and polish your shoes. Here is a new neck-tie, too, that I'd like you to wear."

"Why, mother, what is going to happen?" he asked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid are going to entertain some friends here this evening, and have invited you and me to join them," Mrs. Heatherton explained.

The Langmaids' private parlor opened by folding doors into the great drawing-room, and it had been arranged to have Ned and his mother come there, after which the doors should be thrown open, and the young hero presented to the guests who should assemble to honor him.

"Hum! that's rather queer, isn't it?" Ned remarked, with surprise, for he and his mother were not in the habit of being presented to the friends of the guests.

"Queer?" repeated Mrs. Heatherton, flushing slightly, for anything like evasion or deception was wholly foreign to her nature. "No, I think not, for you know the Langmaids have been very kind to us ever since they came."

So Ned took great pains with his personal appearance; his mother arranged his necktie in the most approved style and tucked a fine hemstitched handkerchief into his vest-pocket, then told him to come for her at half-past seven, and they would go down together.

He promised, and then ran down to the office, to do what might be required of him until the hour appointed.

On his way he noticed some men in the vestibule; they had evidently just arrived, and one had a harp,

two others violin boxes and the fourth something that looked like a cornet case.

He wondered how they happened to be there, but there were parties frequently at the private residences in the vicinity to which orchestras came down from the city; so Ned thought there was probably something of the kind going on that night, and the men had come to the hotel merely to get their supper.

The clerk smiled as he entered the office, looking so bright and spruce, then he gave him a note which he told him to take to a cottage at some distance from the hotel, and wait for an answer.

Ned ran away upon his errand, as happy as a lark, but he got out of all patience waiting for the answer, for it was fully half-past seven, and almost dark, when he returned to the hotel.

He handed his missive to the clerk, who told him that would be all he would want of him that night; then he bounded upstairs to his mother, whom he found looking like a picture with a bunch of Catharine Mermet roses pinned to her corsage, and a pair of pearl-colored kid gloves on her hands.

"Halloa! mother! how swell we are!" he exclaimed, regarding her admiringly, "what is up to-night, anyway?"

"Come with me, and you will soon find out," she answered, with a gay little laugh that was like music in his ears.

They descended the stairs together and went directly to Mrs. Langmaid's room.

Mr. Langmaid was waiting outside the door for them.

He gave his arm to Mrs. Heatherton and led her within the parlor, where they found Mrs. Langmaid, beautifully dressed in lavender silk and blazing with diamonds.

She greeted Ned and his mother very cordially, then the doors of the room suddenly rolled back, revealing to Ned's astonished eyes the grand drawing-rooms all ablaze with light and gorgeous with potted plants and cut flowers, which had been profusely scattered everywhere.

Every guest in the house was present, dressed in their best, and all the girls and boys in gala attire, while as the doors opened, the orchestra, stationed at the farther end of the room, behind a screen of flowers, struck up a gay air, and the mystery of their presence in the house was explained to Ned.

But the boy was amazed.

What could it all mean? this attention to his mother and himself; all these finely dressed people looking toward them with smiles of welcome, and the burst of music that had greeted their presence?

But he was not long left in doubt. Mr. Langmaid led his mother to a place near some tall flowering plants, Mrs. Langmaid followed with him. Then he saw little Nellie Trafton coming toward them, all dressed in white, with gleaming pink ribbons fluttering with every movement, and holding a pretty white box in her hands.

She stopped directly before Ned, and nodded and

smiled at him. The band stopped playing, then the child, lifting her voice so as to be heard by every one in the room, made a pretty little speech, the drift of which Ned, in his embarrassment, could hardly understand, though he caught the words, "brave boy"—"young hero"—"noble man," and other similar phrases; then, in some way he never could exactly tell how, he found a beautiful velvet-lined morocco case open in his hands, while, bewildered and astonished, he looked down upon a handsome gold watch and chain, and knew that they had been presented to him by the guests of the house for his bravery in helping to kill the mad dog a few days previous.

A great, glad, exultant heart-throb sent the rich blood surging to his brow.

A watch! a gold watch! and all his own, to keep and use! He did not believe there was a boy in the United States as happy as he at that moment.

He turned a questioning look upon his mother who was smiling fondly upon him, but with tears in her lovely eyes, for he felt that he ought to say something in return for the beautiful gift; but he was tongue-tied and did not know what to do.

Then he glanced appealingly at Mr. Langmaid.

"Please, will you thank everybody for me?" he faltered; and the gentleman, in a few well-chosen words, expressed Ned's appreciation of and delight in his new possession, and the kindness which had prompted it.

From this he drifted into some pleasantries and witticisms regarding the "modesty of certain individuals who, ignoring their own merit, were all enthusiasm

for others!" then, before the man dreamed of his intention, he turned to Mr. Lawson, who stood near him, enjoying Ned's surprise and boyish delight, and presented him with a beautiful gold-headed cane, to take the place of the very ordinary one that had been broken in the struggle with the rabid dog.

Then the band struck up again, and presently all the children and young people, as well as some of the older ones, were whirling about the room in a merry dance, while Mrs. Heatherton dropped Ned's watch into his vest pocket, and fastened the chain—which had been Mr. Lawson's individual gift—in his button-hole.

It was a merry, happy evening, and Ned never forgot it, nor how kind and genial all those wealthy and distinguished people were toward him.

He could not dance, but he marched about the room with Gertrude Langmaid and some of the other girls, who were only too eager to smile upon and do honor to the young hero of the occasion; even pert little Miss Montague now seemed only too eager to secure the favor of that "common errand-boy."

At nine o'clock there was a sumptuous supper in the dining-room, after which there was more dancing or merry-making in the drawing-rooms until half-past ten, when everybody shook hands with Ned, with as much eagerness and courtesy "as if he had been the President of the United States," he said after which he went up stairs to bed, flushed and tired, but happy as a prince in his new possession, and in the thought

that such a "jolly good time had been made all for him in that grand hotel."

CHAPTER XII.

MIRIAM'S FUTURE IS UNEXPECTEDLY PROVIDED FOR.

The remainder of the summer passed very pleasantly, but nothing more of marked importance occurred in connection with either Ned or his mother.

Both grew well and strong; Ned became as brown as a berry, from being much in the open air, while Mrs. Heatherton's cheeks filled out round and plump, and, with the burden of the last thirteen years removed from her heart, her eyes became bright with enjoyment in the present and hope for the future, her step as light and elastic as that of a girl of eighteen.

"I never expected to be so well again," she once told Mr. Lawson, when he remarked upon the change in her appearance; "and," she added, gratefully, "I feel that I owe it all to you."

"Humph! perhaps you're not as much in my debt as you imagine," he returned, laconically, and flashing a peculiar look at her out of his keen gray eyes.

She did not pay much heed to his words; but, later, they recurred to her with a meaning she did not then attribute to them.

Miriam found Mrs. Langmaid a very kind and congenial friend, and the two women were often seen

sitting together on one of the upper verandas, chatting sociably, when Mrs. Heatherton's duties were over for the day.

Ned and Gertrude were also the best of comrades, in spite of the fact that some of the little lady's friends, who were perhaps jealous of the attentions she received, sometimes tossed their heads scornfully and spoke contemptuously of the "errand-boy."

But she would never hear a word against him without spiritedly resenting it, and constituted herself his valiant champion upon every occasion.

Mrs. Heatherton would smile when, sometimes, she overheard her speak in high praise of Ned, and wonder if she would be as true and fearless when another decade of years should have passed.

The month of October, however, found the great hotel almost empty and deserted, for, at the approach of frosty weather, the guests all fled to the city and warmer quarters; only a few of the officials and servants remaining to temporarily put the house in order for the winter.

Mrs. Heatherton was among these, and the linen-room had never been in such prime condition and so amply furnished, as, when she at last turned the key in the door, on the day of her own departure, and took it down to the clerk in the office.

She found Mr. Lawson there giving some last instructions to the clerk, and, turning to her as she was about leaving the room, he abruptly remarked:

"So you are going to-day?"

"Yes; there does not seem to be anything more that

I can do, and it is high time that Ned was back in school," she responded, but repressing a little sigh at the thought of leaving the sea and going back into close quarters in the city.

"Come into the reception parlor—I want to talk with you a few minutes," Mr. Lawson commanded, and she followed him to the room designated, wondering what he could have to say to her that need be spoken so privately.

"What are you going to do this winter?" he abruptly inquired, as she seated herself to await his communication.

"That is a subject upon which I wished and intended to consult you before leaving," Miriam replied, flushing. "I have been able to save the most of what Ned and I have earned this summer, and I have been thinking that I would like to take some rooms in a little better locality than where we lived before. I am strong and well now, and if I can find employment, I think I shall be able to do very well during the winter. It was very kind of you to bring us here for the summer, and it has done us both a world of good."

"Humph! I guess the obligation isn't all on your side—I imagine you've paid your way and earned all you've got. So you want to give up those rooms on Harrison avenue, do you?"

"Yes, sir; I hope you will not be offended," said Mrs. Heatherton, appealingly. "You have been very kind to allow our furniture to remain there, and—I am willing to pay for their storage; but it isn't just the

neighborhood for a boy like Ned to be in," she concluded, with an anxious gleam in her eyes.

"Where do you expect to live?" the man inquired, without making any reply to her remark.

"I do not know—I cannot tell until I have looked about a little," she said, thoughtfully.

"What are you going to do to support yourself?"

"I think I shall apply to some industrial bureau for fine sewing, or fancy work, which command higher prices than plain sewing."

"Then you'll have to sit all day, and get thin and pale again," remarked Mr. Lawson.

"I hope not, although that kind of work does not agree with me as well as some more active employment; but I have so much strength, to start with, perhaps I can bear it better than last year. Then, perhaps—if I have given satisfaction here, you will allow me to come back again next summer," Miriam concluded, with a wistful glance at her companion.

"We'll see about it—we'll see about it," he evasively replied.

"But Mr. Lawson," she continued, with some nervousness, "I have something to tell you—a confession that I feel I owe you in view of your kindness to us, and which I cannot go away without making. My real name is not Wallingford."

The man started and searched her face earnestly.

"Humph! what is it, then?"

"Heatherton—my husband's name was Richard Heatherton."

Benjamin Lawson jumped to his feet as if he had been shot, and began to pace the floor excitedly.

"So, you've been sailing under false colors all this time," he brusquely remarked, as he turned his back upon her, and stopped, as if to look out of a window.

Miriam Heatherton seemed distressed, for she imagined that she had offended him.

"Not exactly that," she began, hesitatingly; then as if suddenly inspired to confide in him, she inquired: "May I tell you all about it? Have you time to listen to me?"

"Go ahead!" he commanded, "there's time enough," and she told him all her sad story, while the man stood like a statue by the window and never moved until she finished.

Then he suddenly exclaimed, with characteristic energy:

"—— scamp! I mean that husband of yours. I should think you'd be glad he is head. I suppose you've got the papers to prove your marriage to him."

"Yes, fortunately. I can prove all that I have told you," she answered.

Mr. Lawson suddenly wheeled around at this point and fixed his small gray eyes upon her, as if he meant to read her inmost thoughts.

"Why have you told me this?" he sharply demanded.

"Why!" said Mrs. Heatherton, with gentle surprise, "because you have taken such an interest in Ned and me, I felt that I owed you this much of my confidence; besides, upon our return to Boston, I intend to take

the name of Heatherton for my boy's sake, and I wished you to know it."

"Humph!" the man ejaculated, then relapsed into a brown study. After a few moments he added; "yes, that is right—that is right; the boy should have his father's name, even if he was such a rascal—used you abominably. I'm glad he is dead and that you are free from him, even if you are not. Look here!" he suddenly exclaimed, "how'd you like to be housekeeper for—for a small famliy? I don't mean to do the drudgery, but just to direct the servants and see that everything goes on ship-shape."

"I think I should like such a position very much," said Miriam eagerly, "only——"

"Only what?" he asked, as she hesitated.

"I should not like to be separated from Ned."

"Of course not—who said anything about your being separated from the boy?" Mr. Lawson exclaimed, with some spirit. "He'll need his mother during the next six or eight years more than he ever has yet. But I guess I've beaten about the bush long enough. The long and short of it is, I want a housekeeper."

"You!" cried Miriam, surprised.

"Yes. I have a house on Mount Vernon street, but it has been shut up ever since I went abroad, three years ago and I begin to feel rather homesick. I've knocked about from pillar to post, and lived in hotels so long. What do you say to coming to keep house for me—the boy, of course, to come too. I've taken quite a shine to him, and I think I'd enjoy having him about. It'll be a comfortable home for you both. I

always have a cook and second girl, so the duties won't be very hard. Will you come?"

Tears rushed to Miriam Heatherton's eyes at this delightful and unexpected proposal.

"You are very kind, Mr. Lawson," she faltered. "But surely a cook and second girl ought to be able to look after one man—you have told me that you have no family—without the additional expense of a housekeeper."

"They ought to, that's a fact," Mr. Lawson assented, "but they don't; they take matters into their own hands and run the house as they please, and there's no comfort in it. I've tried it and know. Besides, they quarrel so, like a couple of old cats, there is no peace in the house, and it takes a housekeeper to keep them straight. I've got to have one anyway, whether you take the place or not," he concluded with decision.

"Then I am sure I shall be very glad of the position," said Miriam, flushing with mingled gratitude and pleasure; "only, in that case," she added, "I think you might dispense with the services of the second girl. I could easily attend to her duties, if you secure a good cook."

Mr. Lawson chuckled audibly over this suggestion.

"I see you're economically inclined," he said, with a nod of approbation; "but I like to be waited on at table and I've no notion of having anybody jumping up and sitting down every other minute, as you'd have to do, if there wasn't a waitress; no, I guess you'll have to put up with a second girl if you come. I suppose

it will be more work to manage two than one, but I reckon you'll be equal to it."

Mrs. Heatherton smiled at his way of putting it, and remarked that she would do her best to make him comfortable; whereupon he gave a grunt of approval, and looked as if a heavy burden had rolled off his mind.

"I guess you'd better go right home with me to-day," he said, after a moment of thought. "I'm going up on the five o'clock boat—if you can be ready then, and it will be agreeable to you."

Mrs. Heatherton said it would be both convenient and agreeable, and thanked him again for this kindly provision for her future, which he had made for her.

Then she excused herself and ran up to her room to give vent to her overcharged feelings in a burst of grateful tears.

Ned was jubilant when he was informed of the arrangement.

"Mount Vernon street! Great Scott! mother! that's up among the 'bong tong,' as Katherine Montague calls it; it'll be quite a jump, too, from the fourth floor on Harrison avenue into a brown-stoned swell-front," and the happy boy inserted his thumbs in the arm-holes of his vest and strutted about the room, assuming all the airs of a young dude, much to the amusement of his mother.

"You must not forget that position does not make the man, Ned," she said, reprovingly.

"I won't forget any of the good things that you say to me, mother, but you can't blame a fellow who's had to climb three flights of stairs to get his dinner

for wanting to crow over a dining-room on the first floor—that is, if I'm to be allowed to sit at the table with our jolly old friend."

"Of course you are; that is understood," said Mrs. Heatherton.

"Well, you'll have to get some nice new dresses, if you are going to live in such a grand house," Ned observed; then it suddenly struck Miriam that nothing had been said about any remuneration for her service during her conversation with her friend.

Perhaps, she thought, Mr. Lawson considered it would be sufficient compensation if he gave Ned and herself a home; but in that case they would find it somewhat difficult to clothe themselves in a presentable manner.

However, she resolved not to borrow trouble over the matter; she had pledged herself to go as Mr. Lawson's housekeeper and she would not go back on her word. She would at least try it for a while, and she could resign her position at any time if she found it either uncomfortable or unprofitable.

She would certainly have to get some better dresses, as Ned had suggested.

Her duties at the hotel had been such that it did not matter how simply she dressed, so she had not purchased much during the summer; but, if she was going to be mistress of the house of a wealthy gentleman, she knew that she must make a good appearance before his servants, as well as before his friends; therefore, she resolved to give attention to the matter immediately after her return to Boston. That evening, at seven

o'clock, found her formally installed in her new position in Mr. Lawson's handsome and spacious home on Mount Vernon street.

It was beautifully furnished, but plainly showed that it had not been nicely cared for by the indifferent servants whom he had employed; but Miriam knew that a little time and pains would bring order, beauty, and cleanliness into it before many days.

An experienced cook and second girl were engaged, and ere a week had passed the place wore a very cheerful and homelike look, under the new housekeeper's supervision.

The Monday following their return to Boston, Ned was put into the nearest school, and came home at noon greatly elated, because he had found Gertrude Langmaid a pupil in the same class with himself.

"And, mother, she lives in a most beautiful house on Arlington street, opposite the public garden," he informed his mother, and was all enthusiasm over the discovery.

CHAPTER XIII.

"STOP! YOU YOUNG SCAMP!"

Miriam Heatherton felt as if "the lines had fallen in pleasant places" for her and Ned, for, in spite of Benjamin Lawson's peculiarities—and they were numerous—they found him a kind and agreeable person to live with.

It was very evident that he was growing more and

more fond of Ned every day, while toward Miriam his manner, though always more or less abrupt, was ever characterized by a sympathetic gentleness which touched her deeply.

She made a charming as well as a practical mistress of his home, during the first fortnight; she had some trials and feared that she might find it difficult to fill the position satisfactorily, for the servants, looking upon her simply as "hired help," like themselves, undertook to make things disagreeable for her, and, upon several occasions, ignored her orders and obstinately persisted in doing the work according to their own notions.

Mrs. Heatherton did not like to complain to Mr. Lawson if she could avoid doing so, for she well knew that nothing is more annoying to a man than trouble about domestic arrangements, and she finally resolved upon a bold experiment before appealing to him.

One morning the cook flatly refused to carry out her instructions regarding dinner for that day, simply because she wished to make some changes, for the sake of variety, from the usual mode of serving the meat and dessert.

"Indade, thin, I'll not be workin' mesel' to the bones, fur the loike of yez," hotly asserted the "queen of the kitchen," with her arms akimbo and her ruddy face several shades more crimson than usual. "The mate'll do well enough widout th' stuffin'; there'll be no Yorkshire puddin', and I'll not bate me arms off wid frostin' th' custard."

This was open rebellion in good earnest, and Mrs.

Heatherton well knew that things could not go on after that fashion. She must assert herself, once for all, and have her position thoroughly understood and acknowledged, or she might as well resign it at once.

She thought a moment before replying, and until the momentary flush of anger had faded from her cheek, then she quietly remarked:

"Bridget, the meat will be stuffed, as I have directed; there will be a Yorkshire pudding, and the custard must be frosted."

"Thin it's yersel' that'll be doin' it, I'm thinkin' " defiantly and impudently retorted the cook, while a low chuckle from behind the dining-room door convinced Miriam that Mary, the second girl, was keenly enjoying this word battle, and curious to see who would come out ahead.

"Very well," she replied, with a decision there was no mistaking, "I can do it—I understand cooking perfectly. But if I am to do the work in the kitchen, there will be no occasion for your remaining, and you can go directly to your room and pack your trunk. I will settle with you at once."

Miss Bridget looked dumfounded for a moment at this—the wind was entirely taken out of her sails so to speak, but only temporarily. She soon rallied and returned to the fray.

"Get along wid yez," she cried, excitedly; "d'ye think I'll be afther takin' me discharge from the loikes of yez? Ye're no better o' a servant yersel'—hired fer what yez can get. Whin the master tells me to go, I

get out; but not for yez," and much more of the same import.

Mrs. Heatherton calmly waited until she had finished her tirade, then she remarked, as serenely as if they had been discussing some point of minor importance:

"It is worse than useless, Bridget, for you to assume such an attitude toward me. It is true that I am hired to take charge of Mr. Lawson's house, but I occupy the position of mistress here, and mistress I shall be as long as I remain in it; and whoever comes here as cook or second girl"—this with suggestive emphasis, intended for other ears—"will both have to do as I direct, or they cannot remain. I wish you to understand this distinctly. I would much prefer to be upon friendly terms with you, and there is no reason why we should not all get along pleasantly together if we will agree to faithfully do the work that belongs to us. Now, if you choose to get the dinner, as I have ordered, and yield me obedience in the future, you can remain here—otherwise you will go to-day."

"Ye've no right to be turnin' me off widout me week's notice," the girl returned in a more subdued tone, and with a suspicious tremor in her voice.

"I know it is customary to give a week's notice, but you cannot remain here another hour if you refuse to do as I desire. It will do no good for you to appeal to Mr. Lawson, as he has given me entire control of the house, and does not wish to be troubled about house-keeping matters. Let me see—you were paid last week, so I owe you for just four days' labor," and

Miriam drew forth her purse, as if to settle with her on the spot.

"Oh, sure, I was niver treated so before in all me born days," whined Bridget, with a very red and disconsolate face.

"You can understand, Bridget, that there must be some one here to direct; and, since Mr. Lawson has given me that position, it is my duty to do the best that I can for him," Miriam gravely remarked; then added: "I will pay you a full week's wages, since I give you no notice, or—you can remain upon the conditions which I have named, if you choose. You are a very good cook—your omelet this morning was delicious."

Bridget's face softened considerably at this judicious praise.

"An' sure, ma'am, it was the resate yez gave me yersel'," she said, taken off her guard.

"I know it, but it requires care to make it nicely, and it was done just to a turn," Miriam replied, but with a twinkle of amusement in her eyes; then she continued, "I have a very nice recipe for meat stuffing also, which I intended to ask you to try to-day, for I know that Mr. Lawson would like it; however, I shall make it myself."

"Indade, ma'am, and ye needn't be b'atin' an' tirin' yersel' wid th' cookin' at all, at all; it's mesel' that'll do it the best I can fer yez; yer a leddy, every inch, an' ye mustn't be mindin' because me quick temper got th' bether of me for wanst. An' mebbe yez would like a brown gravy fer th' meat to-day?"

"Yes, it would be nice," responded Miriam, tactfully and gracefully accepting the situation. "When I go upstairs I will send the recipe down by Mary."

Thus Bridget, thoroughly subdued by the firmness of her mistress, returned to her work, while Mrs. Heatherton, with a quiet smile on her lips, went up to her own room to rest after the spirited encounter.

There was no more mutiny in the house after that, for Mary, the second girl, taking the cue from the lesson to the cook, was as docile and obedient as could be desired, and Mr. Lawson thoroughly enjoyed his orderly and lovely home, which grew even more charming as time went on, for Mrs. Heatherton's skilful fingers wrought many a tasteful decoration to add beauty and brightness to it.

Ned enjoyed his school and threw himself heartily into the business of getting an education.

He grew very ambitious too, for, being in the same class with Gertrude, his pride would not permit him to drop behind her in anything, and there were no brighter pupils in that grade, than these two who appeared to be running a friendly race with each other.

Gertrude continued to treat him just as courteously as ever, and Ned was always sure to receive an invitation whenever there was any party or festivity in the Langmaid mansion for the little lady and her friends.

Mrs. Langmaid and Mrs. Heatherton also exchanged social calls and grew to prize each other more and more as time went on.

Thus years passed, the winters occupied with home-

duties and school, in Boston, the summers spent at Nantasket, where Mr. Lawson decided that he preferred to occupy a cottage, instead of going to the hotel. It was more quiet and home-like, he said, and he could not give up his housekeeper even for the sake of having the linen-room as orderly and well furnished as he knew she would have it.

The fair woman seemed to grow young and light-hearted during this time, and was "even more beautiful than when she was a girl," Mr. Langmaid once remarked to his wife.

Ned was now a smart, fine-looking lad of fifteen; intelligent, attractive in manner, and always careful about his personal appearance. He was a boy to be proud of.

One day, during this third summer at Nantasket, Mr. Lawson sent him up to Boston upon an errand of some importance, for the weather was very warm, and the old gentleman did not feel quite equal to going himself.

As he landed at Rowe's wharf, and was making his way up toward Atlantic avenue, he felt a rude jostle on the arm, and glancing around, saw a familiar form dart rapidly past him.

"Why!" he exclaimed to himself, "I do believe that is Bill Bunting! I haven't seen him since that day we got Gertrude's dog away from him. What can he be up to now, dodging about at that rate? He seems to be following that lady dressed in black lace, and he doesn't look one bit more respectable than he used to."

The crowd surged in between them, just here, and Ned lost sight of his old-time enemy for a moment.

But, presently, as he came out upon the street, he suddenly found himself among a group of people that had gathered around the lady in black lace, whom he had thought Bill was following, and who seemed to be in great distress of mind on account of something.

She was telling the people about her a story that appeared to interest them greatly, and Ned heard her say:

"I had it only a moment ago, for I took it from my pocket to get a nickle with which to pay my horse-car fare. I know that some one must have stolen it from me just now. It was a dark green leather purse, with a silver clasp and corners, and there were nearly fifty dollars in it. Where is there a policeman? Call an officer, some one, please, to help me."

An officer was at hand, for he had seen the crowd, and had come forward to disperse it.

The woman immediately appealed to him, rehearsing the story already related.

"Well, madam, I am sorry for your loss," he said, respectfully; "but if the purse has been stolen from you, I am afraid you will never see it again. Probably the thief is already a quarter of a mile or more from here."

Just at this instant, Ned felt some one nudge his elbow, and looking around he found himself face to face with Bill Bunting.

"Hello!" said the gamin, a malicious grin expand-

ing his cruel lips, "haven't seen you for ages. Where've you been all this time?"

"Here in Boston, mostly," Ned answered, civilly, but somewhat coolly.

"You don't say! You must have moved off Harrison avenue, then."

"Oh, yes; three years ago."

"Humph! Where to?"

"Mount Vernon street."

"Golly! had a boost in the world, hain't you? How'd ye get it?"

"My mother is housekeeper for a Mr. Lawson who lives there," Ned replied, as he strove to move on, for the crowd was dispersing, and he did not care to be seen with Bill. He had grown into a tall, awkward fellow, was ragged, dirty and vicious-looking, in more ways than one, and a very disagreeable companion.

But Bill stood close to him and managed to edge his way, the malicious grin still on his bronzed face, an evil, cunning gleam in his wicked eyes.

"Lawson, eh!" he repeated; "guess I haven't the pleasure of his 'quaintance. He must pay your ma pretty well, though, or you couldn't wear such swell clo's. Golly! if he hasn't got on a starched collar and cuffs, and a necktie with a gold pin in it! Say, what'll you take for that pin?" and the boy's dirty hands came uncomfortably near Ned's face, as he appeared about to snatch the coveted bit of jewelry from his tie, while the boy, with awkward movement, stumbled up against Ned with a force which nearly threw him off his feet.

Ned recovered himself and drew back from him, as he replied.

"I do not wish to part with it—my mother gave it to me last Christmas." Then, anxious to get away from such company, he added, "I must hurry on my way, for I have an errand to do for Mr. Lawson," and turning away from the disagreeable fellow he started off at a brisk pace.

But he had not taken a dozen steps when he heard a stern voice behind him cry out:

"Not so fast—not so fast! Stop! you young scamp."

Ned did not dream that this command was addressed to him, and was greatly astonished when, the next moment, a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder, while glancing up, he looked straight into the face of the officer whom he had seen, a few moments previous, talking with the woman who had been robbed.

"Thought you were going to get off nicely and have a fine time with your 'swag,' didn't you?" sarcastically continued the policeman, as his grip tightened upon the boy's arm.

"Sir!" said Ned, flushing, and looking blank, "I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you now?" sneered the man. "Perhaps I can sharpen your understanding a trifle—what have you got in your pockets?"

"What pocket?—where?—I——" Ned stammered, disjointedly, as he thrust a hand into each pocket of his jacket, when his heart suddenly gave a bound, that well-night suffocated him, as in the left one, his

fingers closed over something which he did not dream that he possessed.

He drew it forth, a look of consternation on his handsome face, and lo! it proved to be a lady's purse of dark-green leather, with a silver clasp and corners.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DARK OUTLOOK FOR NED.

"Aha! thought you might as well, didn't you?" jeered the officer, and looking very triumphant over what he considered "a very neat job." "It struck me that you were in considerable of a hurry to make yourself scarce. "Here, madam," he continued, turning toward the woman, who was still very much excited over her loss. "Come this way and prove your property. Is this the purse you were speaking of?"

"Yes—yes; that is mine, and I can prove it," she said, coming eagerly forward, while the crowd began to gather again, and to close up around Ned and the officer. "You'll find three ten dollar notes, two fives, and some small bills in it," she continued, "also a memorandum for my day's shopping, and a broken ring, set with a moonstone and two garnets."

"All right; the property is yours without any doubt," said the policeman—who had opened and examined the purse while she was speaking—as he passed it to her. "You'll please give me your address, mar'm" he added,

"for you will doubtless be needed as a witness when the case comes up for trial."

Ned's heart sank, with a terrible fear, at these words. Could it be possible that he had been arrested as a thief?

True, the purse had been found upon his person, but he had no more idea than his mother, down at Nantasket, how it came to be in his pocket.

But stay! It suddenly flashed upon him that Bill Bunting might have put it there.

He remembered having seen him following that woman when he had jostled him on coming from the boat; he must have stolen the purse, and then, out of a spirit of revenge, dropped it into his pocket.

He recalled how, three years previous, when Gertrude Langmaid's dog had been found in his possession, he had sworn that he would "be even" with him for having put the police on his track, and this doubtless was the way he had taken to carry out his threat.

For a moment he was so overcome with astonishment and distress he could not say one word, and stood where he had been arrested, trying to regain his breath and scattered wits.

Meantime the officer had written down the woman's address, and now turned to him, taking hold of him roughly.

"Come, now, you young thief; I'll take you to a place of safety, and give you an opportunity for a little quiet meditation."

"But, sir," Ned now said, at last finding his voice,

"I did not steal that purse—I do not know how it happened to be in my pocket."

"No—I suppose not," retorted the man, sarcastically, at which several of the bystanders laughed derisively, "but you'll hardly deny that it was in your pocket."

"No, sir; but, truly, I am no thief—I never stole anything in my life."

"Oh, no, of course not. You only borrowed the purse, in case you should want a little spending money. It's an argument I can't quite comprehend; but perhaps you'll be able to make the judge understand it to-morrow morning. What's your name?"

Ned thought a moment before replying.

He saw that he had been thrown into a very unpleasant predicament, and that it would be worse than useless for him to resist the law. He resolved to go quietly with the officer and then send at once for Mr. Lawson. But he would not talk much until he could have advice; so he replied, with more of composure than he had yet shown:

"I do not care to give my name at present."

"Just as you please," was the surly reply; "but come on now—I've no time to waste here talking with you."

"Come!—where?" Ned asked, with a terrible heart-sinking.

"Why, to the stationhouse, of course, where all thieves have to go until they are tried," was the unfeeling retort, for the man was angry at his refusal to tell his name.

Ned shuddered at the words "stationhouse."

What would his mother think when he did not return at the time appointed?

What would Mr. Lawson say when he did not put in an appearance with the important papers intrusted to him?—how would they both feel when they should learn that he had been arrested as a common thief?

What could he do?—how could he bear it?

Oh! what would Gertrude and Mr. Langmaid say, when they should perhaps read his name in the paper to-morrow in connection with such a disagreeable affair; and then, worst of all, he had no way of proving that he did not steal the purse, and he might have to go to the reformatory to serve out a sentence for a crime he had not committed.

But he plainly realized that it would be useless to resist the officer; the purse had been found upon his person, and, no matter how it had come there, he must answer for the fact as best he could, and let matters take their course.

So, with a flush of shame upon his cheek, his head bowed upon his breast, and a dejected air, he unresistingly walked with the officer toward the station-house.

Upon reaching that place he asked the privilege of sending a telegram to Mr. Lawson.

This was granted, provided he could pay for the transmission of the message and he sent the following to his aged friend:

Have been arrested through mistake. Come, but don't tell mother.

NED.

Then he threw himself upon the cot in his cell and

surrendered himself to the unpleasant reflections which thronged upon his mind.

The situation was a most humiliating one to him, for Ned was the soul of honor. His mother had brought him up with very strict notions regarding truth and integrity, and his nature revolted against anything that was mean or tricky. To steal a purse of money, or even a dollar, from any one would have been as impossible to him as to have deliberately robbed a bank.

He was very proud-spirited, also, and the thought of the publicity which must follow his arrest made him indescribably wretched.

Mr. Lawson received Ned's message a couple of hours after it was sent, and was thrown into quite a state of excitement over its startling contents.

He immediately tore it into atoms and scattered it to the winds, then going inside the cottage, he told Mrs. Heatherton that he had just received an important communication, and would be obliged to go to town, after all, by the next boat.

"I am very sorry," the unsuspecting woman remarked, "for you are not well, and the day is very warm."

"H'm," he responded, reflectively, "I may be obliged to stay in Boston over night; would you mind if I kept Ned with me?"

"Oh, no," was the smiling response, "he may remain if you wish," and, having obtained this much of respite, Mr. Lawson hurried away to catch the next boat.

When he arrived at the stationhouse where Ned was

confined, the poor boy almost broke down, so great was his shame at being found in such a place.

He briefly told his friend of all that had occurred, and the man agreed with him in the belief that Bill Bunting was the culprit, and had tried to fasten the crime upon Ned, out of spite of revenge.

"Oh! Mr. Lawson!" Ned exclaimed, during his recital, while he looked him full in the face, but with tears in his frank eyes, "I never thought of such a thing as stealing a purse, or anything else, from any one—I hope you believe me."

"Of course I do—of course I know you didn't take it, and nobody with any sense would suspect you of such a thing," Mr. Lawson loyally but indignantly affirmed, but losing sight, in his sympathy and fondness for the boy, of the stern facts of the case, which pointed so strongly toward his guilt. "But don't be down-hearted—we will fix it all right," he added. "The matter will be easily adjusted tomorrow morning, when you go before the judge."

Ned sighed; somehow he did not feel so confident of his vindication as his friend.

"I don't know what my mother will think," he said, dejectedly; "it will just about break her heart to know that I have been locked up in a stationhouse like a common thief."

"Tut! tut! tut! We'll see to that," said Mr. Lawson encouragingly. "I'm not going to let you stay here long; we'll go up to the house on Vernon street to sleep tonight, and back to Nantasket tomorrow. Now you just keep up a good heart while I go to see what I

can do about getting you out of this place," he concluded, rising.

Ned was considerably cheered by the assurance that he would not have to spend the night in the station-house, and smiled quite hopefully as he bade his friend good-by, remarking that he would try and be patient until his return.

Mr. Lawson sought the proper authorities and petitioned to have the boy released on bail, holding himself bound for his appearance before the court on the next morning.

It was not difficult to arrange this, for he was well known in the city, and money will open a door that would be obstinately locked for the want of it.

In a little more than an hour Mr. Lawson was back at the stationhouse with authority to take Ned wherever he wished, and the two went directly to the Adams House, where Mr. Lawson insisted that they should have a nice dinner, after which they repaired to Mount Vernon street for the night.

Here Ned read the evening paper aloud to his friend, and was greatly relieved to find in it no account of the disagreeable incident in which he had been concerned.

They arose at an early hour the next morning and, after getting a good breakfast at a neighboring restaurant, they sought the office of a noted lawyer, to whom they related the circumstances of their trouble, and placed the case in his hands.

The gentleman remarked that the affair was "rather a nasty one," for the evidence against Ned seemed conclusive; but, possibly, as it was his first offence, if Ned

pleaded guilty, the judge might let him off with a fine and costs.

"But I shall not plead guilty," Ned indignantly responded, "I didn't steal the purse, even if it was found in my pocket, and I shall not tell a falsehood about it."

"What you say may be true, but the easiest way out of the trouble would be to do as I have advised," the lawyer remarked, but smiling at the boy's excitement.

"Would you say that you had stolen a lady's purse if you hadn't?" Ned demanded, with pungent directness.

The attorney flushed slightly, although he looked somewhat amazed at the searching question.

"In law, to gain our case, we are often obliged to do things that are not agreeable," he evasively replied. Then he added, as he noticed the look of scorn on Ned's face, which this revelation of the "tricks of the trade," had called up: "The judge might think you were hardened and obstinate, if you should insist on your innocence in the face of such conclusive evidence against you, and give you a severe sentence; while, if you plead guilty on a 'first offence,' as I have said, he would be likely to let you off quite easy."

"I cannot help it. I did not steal that purse, and I am not going to convict myself of anything so mean and dishonest," said Ned, firmly. "I do not know, I tell you, how it came in my pocket, though I am pretty sure that Bill Bunting put it there to get me into just this scrape. He vowed that he would get even with me sometime, for telling about that dog; but I'll not lie about it, even if I have to go to jail."

"Very likely you are right," returned the lawyer, but looking grave, although he secretly admired Ned for his faithful adherence to principle and believed in him thoroughly.

No one, he thought, could look into his frank, open face, and clear, truthful eyes, or listen to his brave refusal to escape sentence of law by telling a lie, and believe that there was anything mean or vicious about him.

He saw that it would be useless to urge him further to adopt the course he had advised, and he resolved that he would do the best he could for him otherwise.

Mr. Lawson was so well known that his vouching for him—his testimony regarding the last three years of his life, and his story, too, regarding Ned finding and returning the forty dollars which he had lost, would have great weight with the court; while, too, the fact that Bill Bunting had been convicted of having stolen Budge, and been the author of numerous other scrapes, would seem to indicate that Ned's suspicions of him in this instance were correct.

At nine o'clock all three repaired to the courthouse, where they found the officer who had arrested Ned awaiting his appearance, together with the woman whose purse had been stolen.

She regarded Ned with perplexity and real regret when he came into her presence.

"I am sure you do not look like a person who would take what does not belong to you," she said deprecatingly. "I can hardly believe that you stole my purse."

"I did not, madam," Ned responded, as he politely doffed his hat to her, thus revealing his head and broad, open brow. "I never stole anything in my life."

"I am sure of it," the lady answered, gravely, as she searched his clear eyes, "but—it was found on you, and of course some one must have stolen it from my pocket."

"That is true," Ned said, smiling sadly, and flushing, "and I know that things look dark for me; but I am innocent all the same."

"I am very sorry," the lady kindly said.

"Thank you; but I shall try to be game even if the judge finds me guilty," Ned returned, trying to speak bravely; but losing some of his bright color as he thought he might perhaps have to go to prison or to the schoolship, or some other place equally objectionable.

"Oh, Mr. Officer," said the woman, now turning to the policeman. "I am sure this boy's story is true. Cannot something be done to get him off without a hearing? I have my purse and I cannot bear to appear against him; he seems like a nice, respectable fellow."

"It's too late now, marm, for the case has been entered," the man gruffly returned; "but," he added, with a sharp look at Ned, "don't waste your sympathies—you can't always tell about these smooth-looking, oily-tongued youngsters; sometimes they're the worst kind."

Ned flushed again, and turned away with a feeling of indignation and injustice at these uncharitable re-

marks, and then they all entered the courtroom together.

They had to wait some time, for there were two or three other cases to be heard first, and it was between ten and eleven before Ned's was called.

The charge was read, the evidence for the prosecution given, and of course every word told strongly against our young hero.

Then the evidence for the defendant was called for, and as the boy arose from his seat to take his place in the box, he chanced to glance toward the back of the room, when his heart gave a great bound as he saw Bill Bunting sitting there, as ragged and dirty as he had been the day before, and with a vicious grin on his evil face.

Ned's face flushed crimson as he caught the triumphant leer of his enemy's eyes, for it plainly indicated that the felt so perfectly secure from detection that he had recklessly come there to enjoy his victim's downfall.

He bent down and whispered in Mr. Lawson's ear that Bill was present, telling him where to look for him, and to watch him during the examination, then with a firm step and a composed air he mounted the witness-stand.

The usual oath was administered to him, and Ned's look of grave attention and air of reverence as he took the Bible, made a favorable impression upon every one in the room.

Then he was asked, "Are you guilty of the charge

against you?" to which he firmly and unfalteringly replied, "Not guilty, your honor."

His lawyer then remarked that he wished his client to tell his story in his own way, and, permission being given him to do so, Ned proceeded to relate all that had occurred in connection with his errand to Boston the previous day; his meeting with a boy—he did not then give Bill's name—who had long cherished a grudge against him, and who, he believed, had stolen the purse and dropped it into his pocket from motives of revenge.

Mr. Lawson was called, when he concluded, and his account of how he had first made Ned's acquaintance, in connection with the restoration of the forty dollars, his testimony to his unvarying integrity in every respect during the last three years, evidently carried great weight with it.

The judge listened attentively to both recitals, and was impressed both with the truth of the boy's statement and Mr. Lawson's high encomiums.

He then recalled Ned, whom he and the opposing counsel cross-questioned in the most rigid manner, but without making him vary his story in the slightest particular.

The judge's sympathies were with the boy. Still he was there for the purpose of administering "law and justice according to evidence," and that against the prisoner so far outweighed that in his favor, that he felt that it would not do to ignore the facts as presented by the prosecution, and allow him to go scot-free; there must be a sentence of some kind, although

he resolved to make it as light as would be consistent.

He arose, and, after summing up the evidence, remarked that the case was peculiar, that he was impressed with the truthfulness of the prisoner in spite of the circumstantial evidence against him and his heart prompted him to pronounce him guiltless of any intentional wrong; but in the absence of sufficient proof to the contrary, to sustain such a decision, he felt obliged to——

At this point one of the doors at the back of the court-room was thrown open, and a slight, girlish figure darted within, and sprang straight toward the judge, while a clear, sweet voice called out excitedly:

“Wait—oh! wait——”

CHAPTER XV.

HELP COMES FOR NED FROM AN UNEXPECTED SOURCE.

“Please, please wait! I hope I am not too late!” the silvery though anxious tones continued, while the astonished judge and other occupants of the room, together with the no less surprised prisoner in the box, turned to see who had burst upon the scene in this very unceremonious fashion.

She was a young girl, perhaps fourteen years old, slender and rather tall for her years, but not awkwardly so, while her face was exquisitely fair and delicate in its outlines.

Her eyes were large and very blue, with an earnestness of expression that was striking in their clear depths. Her hair, a bright gold, was braided, and hung down her back in a massive plait, being tied at the ends with a soft shade of olive ribbon.

She was dressed in white, very simply made, with a broad sash of ribbon in two shades of olive, knotted about her slight waist with a broad, soft finished leg-horn hat, trimmed with a wreath of hops—also in two shades of olive—black silk gloves and hose with low French kid shoes completed this inconspicuous but very effective toilet.

She made a charming picture as she stood there before the judge, her flushed face upraised to him, apparently oblivious of every one else in the room, and one which the gentleman never forgot.

“Young lady, you are interrupting the proceedings of the court,” the judge remarked, with grave dignity, but with a kindly gleam in his eyes, “and, unless you have something to say upon the case in hand, I must request you to be seated and remain quiet, or leave the room.”

“Oh! I have something to say, sir—please let me tell what I know about Ned Heatherton,” the girl eagerly responded.

“Have you some evidence to give in favor of the prisoner, which bears directly upon the case of theft that occurred yesterday?” the judge asked.

“Yes, sir; yes, sir.”

“Very well, we will hear it. Let the prisoner step

down, and the young lady may take the witness-stand," said his honor.

Ned, with an astonished look on his handsome face, vacated the box, and the girl, evidently greatly relieved to find that she was not "too late," stepped into his place, but giving him a smile of cheer and a friendly nod of greeting as she passed him.

She unhesitatingly took the oath, and then stood quietly waiting to be questioned, while she was so fair, so graceful, so unassuming, and so unconscious in her youthful beauty that she appealed to every heart in that room.

"What is your name?" the judge inquired.

"Gertrude Hilton Langmaid."

"Your age?"

"I shall be thirteen next month."

"Where do you live?"

"No — Arlington street."

"Do you know the prisoner personally?"

"Yes, sir," with a blush and a shy, smiling glance at Ned.

"How long have you known him?"

"More than three years."

"Very well, now you may tell us what you know about his stealing the lady's purse yesterday," commanded the judge.

"Oh, he did not steal it—another boy took it out of the lady's pocket while she stood waiting for a horse-car, and a few minutes afterward, he dropped it into Ned Heatherton's pocket," the little lady confidently replied.

"How do you know this?" demanded his honor with some sternness.

"I saw the boy when he did it," Gertrude unhesitatingly answered, but growing slightly pale and frightened at his tone.

"You saw him! Where were you at the time?"

"In an office on the third floor of a building on Atlantic avenue, just opposite Bowes' Wharf. I went there with a friend who had an errand with her father. I stood looking out of the window, while she talked with him, watching the people as they came up from the boat, which had just come in and I saw this boy——"

"Describe the boy, if you please," interposed the judge.

"He was taller than Ned—a great, awkward boy in ragged clothes, and he was very—very unclean. He had black hair and a very sharp nose. Why! there he is now, sir!" Gertrude suddenly exclaimed, as a slouching figure in the back part of the room arose and moved stealthily toward the door, evidently with the intention of getting out of the place as soon as possible; for Bill Bunting, finding the tables likely to be turned against him by this new and unexpected witness, suddenly became convinced that it would be well to make himself scarce without delay.

"Stop him!" cried the judge, in a voice of thunder.

Bill Bunting turned pale, if such a change could be possible with all the dirt and tan on his face, and, rendered desperate by the startling edict, made a bold dash for the door. But an officer standing near reached

forth his powerful arm, seized him by the collar, and swung him "right about face," thus effectually cutting short his flight.

"Bring him inside the dock," his honor ordered; and when this was done, he turned again to Gertrude, and continued, in a more kindly tone: "You are sure that this is the boy whom you saw rob the lady of her purse yesterday?"

"Yes, sir; I know he is the boy," the maiden emphatically replied.

"Very well. You saw the boy take the lady's purse from her pocket. Describe the purse."

"I don't think I can sir, very well, for I was so far away," Gertrude answered, flushing.

"You are sure it was a purse?" the man asked, smiling slightly.

"It looked like a purse, sir; and a minute after he went up to Ned and began talking with him. Pretty soon he threw out his arm and I thought he was going to strike Ned, but he only tumbled up against him, and then I saw him drop the purse in his pocket——"

"Which pocket?" interposed the judge, with a shrewd twinkle in his eyes.

Gertrude thought a moment, then she said:

"I think it was the left one, sir; for when he fell against him he put his arm around and dropped the purse in the one on the side farthest from him. Ned turned away from him then and the next minute I saw the boy point at him and tell the officer something."

All this tallied so exactly with the evidence which

had already been given in Ned's favor that almost every one was impressed with the truthfulness of it.

"When did you last see young Heatherton, to speak with him?" questioned the judge.

Gertrude flushed to the brows at this question, for it recalled very vividly the regretful, almost pathetic farewell that she and Ned had taken of each other some five weeks previous when she was on the eve of leaving for the White Mountains with her parents.

"Not since the day school closed," she responded, with downcast eyes.

A satisfied gleam shot into the judge's eyes. Evidently there was no collusion between the two parties.

"Why did you not go immediately down to the officer who arrested your friend, tell him what you had seen, and point out the real thief to him?" he asked.

"I did start to do so," the young girl replied. "I was nearly down the last flight of stairs when my heel caught on one and I fell, striking my head against the railing. I was so stunned I did not come really too myself until I was in the carriage going home with my friend. My head was very bad all night, and I did not sleep much until near morning, and so I did not wake until very late. Then I hurried down to Atlantic avenue to see the policeman who had arrested Ned. He was not there, but another man told me that he had gone to court as a witness, and—and that is why I was so late getting here."

"That will do, young lady; you may step down and be seated," said the judge.

Then, rising once more, he said, with a kindly glance at Ned:

"I find the prisoner not guilty. He is honorably discharged, and the case is dismissed. Officer," turning to the man who had arrested Bill Bunting in his flight, "you will take charge of your prisoner until his case is called for trial."

So Ned was released, and proudly left the courtroom in company with his lawyer, Gertrude and Mr. Lawson, his face very bright, his heart very light.

"I say, Gertrude, you're just the pluckiest girl in Boston," he enthusiastically exclaimed, when they were outside the gloomy building, while he turned a pair of gleaming and grateful eyes upon her. "I just believe I should have had to go to the reformatory, or some other dreadful place, if it had not been for you."

"Oh! I hope not—that would have been shocking. But I was awfully afraid, when I got to Atlantic avenue this morning, and found out that you were being tried that I should be too late to do you any good. I ran away and had to depend on the street cars," Gertrude explained, with tremulous lips.

"Ran away!" repeated Ned, wonderingly.

"Yes; you see papa and mamma went away to Philadelphia the day before yesterday, to a wedding, and I was invited to stay with Grace Emerson while they were gone. Mrs. Emerson was very much frightened about the fall, and ordered me to lie quietly in bed all day. She was ill herself, so I did not like to trouble her in any way, and Mr. Emerson had gone down to the office when I awoke, so I could not tell him about

you. Grace had to go to her music-teacher at nine, so I disobeyed orders, got up and dressed myself, and ran away to tell the officer about that dreadful boy who stole the purse. When I could not find him, I was almost crazy, and couldn't think of anything else to do but to come to court myself and tell what I knew."

"Well, you are a very brave young lady, and you have probably saved your young friend here a great deal of trouble by acting so promptly," Ned's lawyer remarked, while he regarded the fair girl admiringly.

"I am very glad," Gertrude answered, with a blush.

Mr. Lawson now drew the attorney aside to settle with him, thus leaving the two young people together.

"I shall never forget this of you—never!" Ned said, in a voice that was husky from grateful emotion. "I believe it would have broken my mother's heart if I had had to go to prison, and I'm sure I never could have held my head up after it."

"Of course it would have broken her heart and mine too," Gertrude naively responded.

Ned flushed at her words, and a glad light leaped into his eyes.

"Would it?" he earnestly asked.

"Yes, indeed," she frankly returned, "and I believe I am not sorry that mean fellow is going to get his pay for playing such a wretched trick upon you—though I think it is dreadful for any one to have to go to prison. What made him do it—who is he any way?"

"Why, that was Bill Bunting—the chap who stole your dog three years ago," Ned explained.

"Why! was it? What a wicked creature he is! Then

of course he tried to make you out a thief, just to be revenged on you for getting Budge back for me," Gertrude excitedly exclaimed.

"Yes, I am sure he never would have given up such a full purse for any other reason—he might have kept it himself as well as not," Ned answered. Then he added, as he searched his fair companion's face somewhat anxiously, "but I can't help thinking about your fall—I hope your head doesn't trouble you now."

"No—not much; once in a while I have a little twinge, but it will be all right in a day or two," the young girl carelessly replied.

Mr. Lawson now rejoined them.

"Well! well! well!" he ejaculated, in a satisfied tone, "we're safely out of the woods—eh? thanks to Miss Gertrude. And now, as it is almost twelve, suppose we all celebrate the occasion by going down to the Adams House and getting an A No. 1 dinner."

"Thank you, Mr. Lawson," Gertrude said, smiling. "I should like to more than I can tell you, but I am afraid that Grace and Mrs. Emerson will be anxious about me, for no one knows where I am, and I am sure I ought to go directly back to them, if you will please put me on a Commonwealth avenue car."

"All right; I suppose we'll have to let you go, though we would be glad of your company at dinner," Mr. Lawson returned, as he stepped forward to stop a car for her.

"Are you going to Nantasket this summer?" Ned inquired, when they were left alone again.

"No; haven't I told you we are going to Europe the eighteenth of this month."

"Going to Europe!" exclaimed Ned, with as much astonishment and dismay as if she had said she was going out of the world.

"Why, yes; but don't look so woe-begone," Gertrude cried, laughing, "for we are coming back the last of September. But I'm glad, though," she concluded, flushing.

"Glad of what?" asked Ned, not comprehending her meaning.

"Glad that you are sorry to have me go," she confessed, with a blush and a shy smile, at which Ned's heart gave a sudden bound for joy.

"Then you'll be back for school?" he said, inquiringly.

"Oh, yes, indeed. Don't you imagine, Ned, that I'm going to let you get ahead of me in school," she roguishly retorted. "I will be back to race with you next year, and I will give you all the mental exercise—as Professor George expresses it—that you will want. Oh! there comes my car. But say, Ned," she eagerly interposed; "if I write to you from abroad, will you answer my letters?"

"Just try me and see," Ned exclaimed, his face all aglow over the proposition.

"All right. Then you look for one by the first return steamer after we land. Now I must go. Good-by," and with a smile and nod of farewell the lovely girl tripped daintily out into the street, where Mr. Lawson helped her upon the car, shoved a nickel into the

hand of the conductor for her fare, and waved his cane in adieu as she disappeared within.

Ned followed her with wistful eyes, and muttered longingly:

"I—I just wish that girl were my sister."

Then he gave a sudden start, scratched his head reflectively, while a peculiar expression illumined his features and a gerat wave of color shot up to his brow.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, under his breath, as if an altogether new idea had struck him. "No—I guess—I don't either."

Mr. Lawson now rejoined him, and asked if he would come and have some dinner.

"If you please, sir, I think I'd rather take the next boat and go home—unless you'd like me to attend to that errand I came for yesterday," Ned replied, feeling as if he wanted to see his mother. It seemed an age since he left her the day before.

"All right, go on—you'll have just time to catch the noon boat, and I'll attend to that matter myself. There's something else, too, that I want to look after," Mr. Lawson responded, then bidding him good-by, with the promise that he'd be home himself by four o'clock, he went about his business, while Ned started briskly off to catch the 12.10 boat.

He stowed himself away in a snug corner of the deck, near one of the great paddle-wheels, and gave himself up to his thoughts, which appeared to be of a very grave nature, for he scarcely moved until the gang-plank was thrown out upon the pier at Nantasket.

Then he sprang ashore and darted away toward one

of the lovely cottages on the bluff, where he was soon rehearsing to his mother the exciting incidents of the last twenty-four hours.

Mrs. Heatherton was considerably wrought up over the matter, but thankful that Ned had come out of it so honorably, while she gave high praise to Gertrude for the noble part she had borne in the affair.

"I am afraid I should have had to go to prison if it had not been for her," Ned gravely remarked, "unless," he added, "I had done as the lawyer advised and pleaded guilty of a first offence. Do you think it would have been right for me to do that mother?"

"No, my son," Mrs. Heatherton decidedly replied. "I think it would have been very wrong; it would have been a deliberate falsehood, and nothing but evil could have resulted from it. You would have sullied your conscience with a lie, and also branded yourself as a thief."

"I knew you would say so, and I wouldn't have done it for anything," Ned said, resolutely. "I should always have despised myself for it; and if that is a specimen of the tricks that lawyers use to gain their cases, I never want to be a lawyer."

CHAPTER XVI.

BENJAMIN LAWSON MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Four years more slipped by without any material change in the lives of our friends on Mount Vernon.

street. The only event of noteworthy importance was Ned's graduation from the High School, where he stood first in his class, his average being ninety-nine and a quarter per cent., while Gertrude Langmaid stood next to him at ninety-eight and three-quarters per cent.

Thus, according to the custom of the school, it lay with these two to open and close the exercises of commencement day.

"Please let Miss Langmaid take the valedictory, sir, and I will deliver the salutatory," Ned remarked, when Professor George announced their standing in connection with the arrangement for the closing exercises. "Being a young lady, I should prefer to have it given to her," he chivalrously added, as he darted a smiling glance at Gertrude.

That young lady, who, by the way, had grown wondrously fair during the last four years, flushed rosily at his words.

"I think that the honors should fall where they belong," she emphatically asserted. "Heatherton stands first in the class, and no one should usurp his place."

"Well, you two must settle the matter between yourselves," the professor good naturedly remarked; "it is immaterial to me."

"Sentiment, farewells, and last words are more characteristic of the gentler sex," Ned observed, with a merry twinkle in his dark eyes that caused a ripple of laughter to run around the class, "and if it is all the same to you, Miss Langmaid, I think I would prefer the salutatory."

Gertrude knew well enough that he only said this because he did not wish to take precedence over her; but, of course, as he said he "preferred" the salutatory, asking it of her as a favor, she did not like to refuse him.

"Very well," she said, with an independent little toss of her bright head, "if Mr. Heatherton desires, I will agree to the exchange, upon one condition, and that is, that an announcement be made regarding the facts of the case so that a wrong impression need not prevail."

"I do not think that is necessary," objected Ned.

"Miss Langmaid is right," said the professor. "You can have the salutatory, Heatherton, if you prefer, but of course any young lady would feel sensitive about accepting an honor which did not belong to her without explaining the situation, and so some announcement regarding your relative standing will have to be made."

This did not quite please Ned, but the matter had to stand thus, and when the important day arrived the two young people did great honor to themselves and their class.

Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid called, in their carriage, at Mount Vernon street, to take Mrs. Heatherton and Mr. Lawson to the hall where the exercises were to be held, and all four were as proud as they well could be over the creditable appearance which their dear ones made, and the high encomiums which they won for the excellence of their literary productions.

"You have a smart boy there, Mrs. Heatherton," Mr. Langmaid remarked to that lady, as he shook

with her at the close of the exercises. "I congratulate you upon being the mother of such a son."

"Hum—well you may, sir; there isn't a smarter boy in the city of Boston," Mr. Lawson proudly asserted, while Mrs. Heatherton thanked Mr. Langmaid with tears in her eyes for his praise of Ned, and said something equally kind regarding Gertrude.

"You just did that business up in grand style," Ned whispered confidentially aside to Gertrude when, with her hands full of flowers, she came down from the stage after delivering her farewells to school, faculty and class. "That was what I call a dignified and first-class valedictory; there wasn't the least bit of bosh or maudlin sentiment about it."

"Thank you, Mr. Heatherton," Gertrude responded, flushing with pleasure, "since I was occupying a position that did not really belong to me, I naturally felt a desire to do credit to it; while, if you will allow me to say it, I was proud of your display of talent to-day."

"Were you, really?" Ned asked, with an animated look.

"Yes, truly; your address was fine and full of thought."

"Much obliged," said Ned, with a low bow, "I do not know of any one I would rather hear say that; only, if you please, I would have liked it better if you had not been quite so formal about it."

"Formal!" repeated the young girl, looking surprised.

"Yes. How long is it since I became Mr. Heather-

ton? Must I begin to call you Miss Langmaid?" Ned inquired, with a sigh.

"No—please don't; but somehow I thought perhaps I ought to—to"—Gertrude stammered, blushed and finally gave up trying to tell what she thought she ought to do.

"You used to call me Ned, until lately; we've always been good friends in the past, and—and I hope we shall be in—in the future," the young man faltered, as he searched the beautiful face beside him with wishful eyes.

"Of course—why shouldn't we be? Why, if I were going to make a list of my friends, I should write your name first of all," the young girl earnestly exclaimed.

"Would you truly—Gertrude?" he eagerly breathed.

"I would, truly—Ned," she retorted, archly, and mimicking his tone, while her eyes grew luminous and the rich color surged up to her brow beneath his earnest, searching gaze. Then she added: "But there is mamma beckoning to me, and I must run away. Good-by; be sure you come to my kettledrum to-morrow at five, and bring Mrs. Heatherton with you," and the fair girl flitted away, leaving her companion with a radiant face, a rapidly-beating heart, and bounding pulses.

"No, I did not mean that," he softly murmured, as if recalling something from out of the past. "I am very glad that she is not my sister. I wonder if I ought—I wonder if I can—— Yes, I will."

What he wondered if he ought and could do, and so

emphatically resolved that he would accomplish, we must leave the future to reveal.

On the afternoon of the day that Ned Heatherton and Gertrude Langmaid graduated with such high honors, Mr. Lawson's attention was attracted, as he was passing up Washington street, to an open barouche in which there were sitting an elderly couple—a gentleman and a lady—and which, even as he looked, drew up and stopped before the entrance to the Adams House.

Both lady and gentleman alighted, and entered the hotel with the air of those familiar with the place as guests.

Mr. Lawson suddenly stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and stared blankly after them, a look of astonishment not unmingled with pain written on his aged face.

"Bless my stars! this is the first time that I've set eyes on them for almost twenty years!" he ejaculated, rubbing his eyes as if to assure himself that he was awake. "I can't be mistaken," he added; "that surely was Tom and his wife. At any rate, I'm going to make sure about it," he concluded, decidedly.

He crossed the street and entered the hotel; but he had not taken a half dozen steps in the hall leading to the gentlemen's reception-room when he ran against the man, whom a few moments previous, he had seen in the carriage.

"I beg pardon," said the stranger, turning to see whom he had thus unceremoniously come in contact with, whereupon he gave a great start, then drew his

stately form proudly erect and regarded his companion with astonishment and evident displeasure.

"Good gracious! Ben Lawson!" he exclaimed, growing white about the mouth.

"There's no mistake about it; and how are you, Tom, after all these years?" responded Mr. Lawson, striving to assume a tone of welcome and an air of friendly greeting.

"Of the same mind still, unless you'll take back what you said during our last interview," was the haughty reply, accompanied by a withering look.

"Can't do it, Tom, for I spoke only the truth, and you know it. The boy was a scamp in every sense of the word, and his treatment of me, as well as of you, was abominable. I agreed to educate him, and promised that he should be my heir if he conducted himself honorably; but I didn't agree to let him run himself over head and ears in debt and into every possible extravagance, and then meekly pay his bills for him," was Mr. Lawson's outspoken reply.

"Humph! I've heard all that rehearsed before, and we will not resume it if you please," sneered the stranger.

"It wasn't the money I minded so much as his lack of principle, his cowardice, and heartless indifference for the feelings of others—his mother's most of all," Mr. Lawson continued, with considerable feeling; then he added, with a frown, "but even that wasn't the meanest of his tricks."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded his companion, getting very red in the face.

"I mean that the story about his entanglement with that girl was all true."

"That was also fully discussed years ago. Why do you recall it at this late day? What if it was true? Many a fellow has done the same thing, while he was sowing his wild oats; and since the boy is dead and gone, why rake it all up again?" hotly retorted the stranger.

"For the same reason that I laid it before you years ago—your duty to the girl whose life he had ruined," gravely returned Mr. Lawson.

"My duty to the girl! She was nothing to me," wrathfully exclaimed the other. "Did you imagine I was going to create a disgraceful scandal by hunting up and harboring a girl who had thrown herself away and got into trouble?"

"But suppose, as I suggested at the time, that she was really Dick's wife?"

"If the boy did anything so rash as to marry her—which I never will believe—and was ashamed to own her, you certainly could not expect a family in our position to saddle ourselves with the low-born creature! Bah! I didn't think you were such an idiot, Ben Lawson," the man sneered.

"But suppose—just suppose that she was his legal wife—that she had a child, do you realize what relationship that child would sustain toward you?—that, his father being dead, it would be the heir to every dollar of the Heatherton property?" demanded Benjamin Lawson, impressively.

"She wasn't his wife—I'll swear to it. A Heather-

ton born and bred would never have been guilty of marrying a low-bred girl like that," cried Thomas Heatherton—for such was the man's name—in a towering passion, though his face had now grown as white as the snowy tie about his neck.

"I'm not so sure that she was ill-bred—I—I've learned that she was very beautiful and well educated," replied Mr. Lawson, in a low tone.

"I don't care if she was as beautiful as a Venus, nor how well educated she might have been; she was poor—and that was enough for me to know. Curse you for a meddling fool, Ben Lawson, with all your suppositions, and I won't hear another word about the matter," the man said, with increasing wrath. Then, with an effort at self-control, he continued, with some curiosity, but in a sneering tone: "I suppose you have willed all your money to some orphan's institution or old woman's home, as you vowed you'd do, when you swore than none of it should ever come into my family."

"That remains to be seen," laconically returned the old gentleman.

"Evidently. Well, we'd better part company; it only makes bad blood between us to argue about the past, and I hope we may never meet again," was the angry rejoinder.

Mr. Lawson winced.

"Then you never would own that girl if she should some time put in an appearance and prove her marriage legal?" he questioned, obstinately returning to the fray.

"Blast you! I believe you really know something

about her," gasped his companion; then he added, hastily, "but I don't care anything about it; I would never own her—never! never!"

"Very well; we'll drop that point for all time," Mr. Lawson quietly returned. Then, his face softening, he continued in a strangely gentle tone for him to use: "Rachel is with you?"

"Yes, of course; I never go anywhere without her."

"I—I would like to see her once more," and the man's voice trembled.

"Not while I live," retorted the other, a hard look settling about his mouth. "I swore it when we quarreled, nearly twenty years ago, and I am not going to break my word now when you're a hundredfold more stubborn than you were then. You'd better be careful about showing yourself to her while we are here, if you don't want to make trouble in the camp," and turning upon his heel, this highly-incensed individual walked from the place, while Mr. Lawson, with a dejected air and trembling lips, made his way into the street.

"My only sister—my pretty, gentle-hearted Rachel! It is rather hard that we must be estranged like this. Twenty years! it is a long time, and we have not once looked into each other's face or heard the sound of each other's voice. But Tom Heatherton has never forgiven me for denouncing and disowning his scamp of a son, though, Heaven knows, he was as hard on him as any one. I was very fond of Dick, though, when he was a boy—he was a keen, bright lad, and I hoped he'd make a good man. I'd have been glad enough to have left

him my fortune if he had lived and hadn't been such a scamp. He was spoiled by being allowed too much money when he was young. Rich men's sons rarely have the backbone and principle manifested by the boys who have to rough it and struggle for a living. I'll just test that boy Ned until he's of age, and if he continue to stand fire in the future, as he has in the past, we'll see about the 'Orphan's Asylum', and 'Old Women's Homes' getting my money.

"Poor Rachel!" he continued, with a sigh, as his thoughts reverted to his sister. "I believe she'd take kindly to the youngster if she only knew, and could have her way; but she has always yielded to Tom, and she wouldn't dare to oppose him in anything at this late day."

The old man gave utterance to another heavy sigh as he hailed a car going down Tremont street.

On reaching his home he found a nice dinner awaiting him, and Miriam Heatherton looking very fair and sweet in a pretty white gown, waiting to serve him; Benjamin Lawson wondered what his haughty brother-in-law would think if he could look into his well-ordered home and see that graceful, refined woman whom he had scorned as "low-bred."

The old gentleman had grown to feel very content and comfortable in her presence, and he had toned down and changed very perceptibly, under her genial influence, during the last few years.

She was always gentle, and kind, and sociable; his home was invariably in the nicest order, his table daintily spread and bountifully supplied.

Ned, too, was ever courteous and respectful, and such a jolly boy to have about the house that the man often wondered what he should do without these two whom he had so strangely found and so strangely befriended.

"‘Low-bred,’ indeed!" he thought that night, as he sat down to his dinner and glanced across the table at the beautiful woman presiding with such ease and quiet dignity behind the massive silver coffee-urn, "wouldn't I just like to bring that pompous old reprobate face to face with her—Tom Heatherton was always fond of a pretty face and figure; then, when he found out how charming and lovable she is, tell him who she is."

He thought it a very strange coincidence that Miriam should ask him, that very evening, if he supposed it would be possible for her to ascertain where her husband's relatives were.

"Humph!" he grunted; glancing keenly at her, "what do you want of them?"

"For one thing, I want them to know that their son was legally married, and that he had a son," she replied a little note of pride thrilling her tones. "Besides that," she continued, with heightened color, "Ned has completed the high-school course, and I would like him to have a collegiate education. Perhaps it is a foolish ambition, considering our circumstances, but I have it nevertheless, and it occurred to me that possibly Richard Heatherton's relatives, if they knew the truth, might be willing to help him to it."

"You would like your husband's family to acknowl-

edge the kinship of Ned?" said Mr. Lawson, inquiringly.

"It seems as if it is Ned's right that he should be acknowledged as his father's son; it might be for his advantage, and I wish to do the best that I can for him," Mrs. Heatherton thoughtfully replied.

"Hum—you might see what could be done," the man said, for he had his reasons for wanting his brother-in-law to know the truth. "I used to know a man in New York by the name of Thomas Heatherton. If you'll give me the proofs of your marriage I will have them copied and sent to him, and a few days will serve to settle the question."

"Thank you—I feel that you are very kind to take so much interest in the matter. You shall have the proofs immediately," Miriam gratefully responded, as she arose and left the room to get them.

CHAPTER XVII.

NED BECOMES A HERO.

Three days after the incidents related in the last chapter, Thomas Heatherton was sitting with his wife, a delicate, sweet-faced woman, in the private parlor of their suite in the Adams House.

It was between nine and ten in the morning. The couple had just finished their breakfast, and the gen-

tleman was reading the Advertiser, while his wife busied herself over a dainty piece of fancy work.

Suddenly there came a knock on the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Heatherton, and a servant entered, bearing a salver loaded with letters and papers, which he deposited upon the table and then withdrew.

"Well! well! mother, we are favored with a large mail this morning," the gentleman remarked, with a smile, as he began to look over the collection; "two for you, three for me, besides this legal-looking document, not to mention several other papers. I wonder what this official envelope contains?"

He hastily tore it open and began to read the paper within.

A look of angry astonishment leaped into his eyes, his face became scarlet, and, after casting a stealthy look at his wife and finding that she was absorbed in a letter, he arose and abruptly left the room.

He repaired to his sleeping apartment, and there continued his examination of the document, though he was evidently greatly excited, and his powerful frame actually trembled with passion.

The paper was a copy of the marriage certificate which the Rev. Dr. Harris, of Chicago, had forwarded to Mrs. Heatherton a few years previous, proving the legal union of Miriam Wallingford and Richard Heatherton.

Besides this, there was also a copy of the record of the birth of a son about a year later, and a lady-like letter, giving something of the forsaken wife's subsequent history, and describing, with all a fond mother's

pride, her manly boy, who was now in his twentieth year and ready for college; "but, lacking the means to pursue the course," Miriam wrote, in her touching but dignified appeal, she had ventured to communicate with her husband's father, in the hope that, for his son's sake, he might be willing to do something toward the education of his only child.

Thomas Heatherton could not fail to be favorably impressed with the cultivated and refined tone of this letter; but, instead of appealing to the man's finer sensibilities, it acted like a match applied to a powder magazine, and he flew into a furious passion over it.

Without waiting to give the subject a second thought, Thomas Heatherton seized a pen and dashed off the following brief and cruel epistle.

Madam: As I discarded my son twenty years ago, on account of his many and flagrant misdeeds while in college—for his disobedience, dissipation, and immorality—so I now discard any and all who may ever have been associated with him, and refuse to acknowledge any ties which he may have rashly formed, whether legal or otherwise.

Thomas Heatherton.

He had been so excited that he had not observed, when reading the letter, the date or name of the place from which it had been written, and he now turned to it to know where to address his reply.

"Boston!" he exclaimed, astonished. "Here! in this very city! Aha! then Ben Lawson must have known all about her when he was here the other day, and this is doubtless a plan of his to reconcile me to the girl. Well, let him send the brat to college, and educate him to suit himself; it would be a good way to spend some

of his surplus money. I'll not have him and that coarse farmer's daughter saddled upon me, though, to be sure, she does write a fine hand and her language is choice and fluent. Oh, Heaven! I don't know why I should have been cursed with such a son! my only child, too!" he interposed, passionately, his face growing white and drawn with pain. "It seems as if I could not bear it; and here Rachel and I are on the home-stretch, with nobody in the world to love and care for us, sick or well, or to perpetuate our name and race when we are dead, and inherit the fortune which should have been Dick's. But I will never own that brat—nobody shall ever make me acknowledge the child of a low, clandestine marriage—if a marriage it really was; and if that girl imagines she is going to get any of my money for her boy, by any such wheedling ways as this, she'll find herself mistaken. The youngster could inherit it, though, if these papers are legal," he went on, reflectively; "but I'll make my will just as soon as I go back to New York—I'll build a church or found a college, or do something else, so that that low-born descendent of a clod-hopper shall not have one dollar of it."

He folded his letter with angry haste, addressed and stamped it, and rang for a boy to post it.

That afternoon Miriam Heatherton received it and the hot blood surged to her temples and her usually gentle eye flashed indignant fire as she read the coarse, insolent, cold-blooded lines which the cruel father of her no less cruel husband had penned.

"Why was I so foolish as to suppose that any ap-

peal could touch him?" she cried, with curling lips; "I might have known that the haughty father of a man, with no more principle than Richard Heatherton possessed could not have much heart. Ah! I pray Heaven that no taint from their character may be allowed to mar my dear boy's nature."

When Mr. Lawson returned, she had recovered her usual serenity of manner, and without making any comment, quietly handed Mr. Heatherton's letter to him.

He read it through, then passed it back to her without a word, but Miriam caught the gleam of a vicious sparkle in the old man's eyes, while his mouth settled into rigid lines of scorn, and she knew that his heart and sympathies were with her, although she did not have a suspicion that any relationship existed between the two men.

She resolved that she would not say anything to Ned regarding what she had done, for if he did not inherit any of the grosser qualities of his father's or grandfather's nature, he certainly did inherit a good amount of pride from herself, and it would have galled him exceedingly to know of this insulting rebuff to her appeal.

But she had set her heart upon his going to college, and she was keenly disappointed, as well as humiliated, by this failure to accomplish her cherished project.

When she went up to her room that night she brought forth her bank-book, and added the column of figures representing the amount of money which, from time to time, she had laid by for this very purpose

since she had occupied her present position as house-keeper for Mr. Lawson.

"Only four hundred and eighty dollars!" she murmured, with a sigh, after going over the figures twice. "It seems very little, but I have done the best I could. Ned's clothes have cost a great deal these last three or four years, since he grew too tall and large for me to make over Mr. Lawson's old ones for him. He might possibly manage to get along for a year or so on this amount, but where the money would come from for the other three years I do not see. I'm afraid he cannot go," and two great crystal drops of disappointment rolled down the fond mother's cheeks.

She had not talked very much with Ned about her desire for him to go to college, for she had feared to raise hopes which could never be realized, so she did not really know what his own plans and wishes might be regarding the subject.

There were still three months before the beginning of the year at Harvard, and she cherished a faint hope that some way might yet be opened for the accomplishment of her long-cherished desire.

* * * * *

Two or three days after the reception of Thomas Heatherton's cruel letter, Ned sought his mother and said:

"Mother, I am going down to Nantasket for the afternoon. Mr. Lawson wants me to open and air the cottage, and see if anything in the way of repairs is needed, before we go down for the summer."

"Very well, dear," Mrs. Heatherton replied; "but there is a cold east wind to-day, and you will do well to take your overcoat; it will be late and damp when you come home."

"What a thoughtful mother!" Ned fondly remarked, as he kissed her good-by, and then he ran softly downstairs, humming a snatch of a gay song.

He found quite a crowd of people on the boat, but no one among them whom he knew, so he installed himself in a comfortable nook on the deck and fell to musing over his last interview with Gertrude, which had been an unusually delightful one.

There had been a severe storm during the night previous, and the sea was still quite rough from it, but Ned noticed that a number of yachts were putting out as the steamer started, while as they went on they met several others coming in.

One in particular attracted his attention.

It was a dainty affair of white and gold, with spotless sails, and everything apparently fresh and new about her, while he could discern a party of three ladies and two gentlemen seated on her deck.

It was a beauty, and Ned's gaze rested admiringly upon it, for he was a dear lover of sailing craft of any kind.

But it was badly managed, he could plainly perceive; for, as the steamer and yacht drew near each other, the skipper, suddenly tacked as if to cross to the other side of the channel, and directly in the steamer's track.

"Is the man a fool?" Ned muttered, excitedly, as he sprang to his feet and leaned over the railing, great

anxiety depicted upon his face. "He will never have time to cross, and she will surely be run down."

The pilot and crew of the steamer also seemed to be greatly disturbed, and the former shouted sharply to the skipper to "have a care and keep off."

But the man either did not hear distinctly, or, out of a spirit of foolhardiness, paid no attention to the order and kept directly on his course.

The pilot gave the signal to reverse the engine, and used almost superhuman efforts at the wheel to assist in avoiding the yacht, but he could not work impossibilities, there was a slight shock, accompanied by screams from frightened women and children, shouts from men, then the steamer swerved to the right, revealing the disabled yacht careened upon one side, her deck almost on a line with the water, while Ned, to his consternation, saw that there were now only two ladies on board, and these, in a state of abject terror, were clinging to a mast; while the men, one in particular, were making the most frantic gesticulations to the skipper and his assistants.

Ned's heart sank as he wondered what had become of the third lady.

Ah! this was soon explained, for, glancing beyond the boat he saw an object struggling in the water, while the steamer, now putting about to aid the disabled yacht, drew near and nearer to it.

Now he sees it distinctly as a head and a white face rise above the blue waves.

It is the lady whom but a few moments previous he had seen upon the deck of the yacht.

It took but an instant for the brave boy to throw off his shoes, remove his coat and vest and spring upon the railing. The next he had cleft the sea and disappeared from sight.

There was a moment of awful silence after this daring act.

Then cheer after cheer arose from a hundred throats as he came up from the depths and struck boldly out toward the unfortunate woman who was just on the point of sinking for the second time.

Ned was an expert swimmer.

Every summer during his sojourn at Nantasket he had spent a great deal of time on and in the water.

He loved the sea; he had learned to dive, to float, to tread water, and to swim with vigorous strokes, and felt almost as much at home in the water as upon land.

He was strong—he did not tire easy, for he knew how to save his strength, and he now put forth every effort, for he knew that not an instant must be lost if he was to rescue that drowning woman before she again disappeared beneath the waves.

The steamer had stopped now, and the sailors were hurrying to lower a boat to go to the brave fellow's assistance.

There was a death-like stillness after that one outburst, while every one watched with bated breath and anxious hearts this desperate race for life.

Ah! he has reached her! He has grasped her clothing! Another moment he raises her head above the water and lays it upon his shoulder.

The form is slight and fragile—the burden is not

much in his strong arms, although she is a dead weight because of her unconsciousness, and Ned turns and strikes out boldly for the steamer from which he sees a boat coming to meet him.

Another hearty cheer breaks over the waters as he reaches its side and yields his precious burden into the hands of the eager sailors, who lay it gently in the bottom of the boat. Ned is then helped in, and the men row back to the vessel, where the savior and the saved are soon out of danger, for the heart of the lady is beating, and they know that she is living.

At the command of the captain the sailors in the boat put off again for the yacht, and in less than fifteen minutes all on board are transferred to the steamer, the yacht is taken in tow, and on the steamer goes again.

There are two or three physicians on board, and they volunteer their services in behalf of the unconscious woman whom Ned had rescued.

She was borne to a double stateroom, attended by her anxious husband and friends, where she soon recovered from her swoon, and was pronounced out of danger. She had been leaning over the railing at the time of the collision, and the shock had sent her with one bound over the side of the yacht into the sea.

Ned, meantime, had been furnished dry clothing by the captain, and, though the outfit was much too large for him, the wise suggestion of his mother, regarding his overcoat enabled him to conceal its awkwardness somewhat, while he found himself none the worse—

though a little weary—from his sudden bath and exciting adventure.

Everybody was eager to make a hero of him, but he modestly withdrew from sight, hiding himself in a stateroom, and did not attempt to land until most of the passengers were ashore.

Then, as he was about to follow, a sailor sought him, and, touching his cap with almost an air of reverence, informed him that "the captain would like to see him in the saloon!"

Ned repaired thither, and that officer remarked, with his most genial smile:

"You're wanted, my young friend—the gentleman whose wife you saved wishes to speak with you."

Ned would have preferred to go his way without undergoing the ceremony of being effusively thanked for what he had done, but he would not be discourteous; so he followed the captain, and was soon ushered into the presence of the party from the yacht.

As he entered the stateroom his glance rested first upon a beautiful old lady, with silvery hair and sweet, delicate features, who was lying in the lower berth, wrapped to the chin in soft rose-blankets.

"This is the young man, sir," said the captain, thus introducing Ned to a portly, fine-looking, but rather pompous old gentleman, who immediately seized his hand in an almost convulsive grasp, while he seemed greatly agitated.

"Heaven bless you! God reward you for the life you have saved, for I never can," he exclaimed, in tremulous tones. "Now, tell me your name, my brave

young friend, that we may know to whom we owe so great a debt."

"Pray, sir, do not make the obligation appear so great," Ned said, feeling embarrassed at being made so conspicuous before strangers, "it is but play for me to swim——"

"That may be," interposed the gentleman, with increasing emotion, "but you have saved a precious life all the same, and the debt is not lessened by that fact. Your name, if you please, my dear fellow."

"Edward Heatherton, sir."

"Great Heaven!" cried the man, suddenly dropping the hand he held, as he would have dropped a red-hot coal, and staggering back from Ned as if he had struck him a blow, instead of having very quietly uttered his own name.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MONEY FOR A HUMAN LIFE¹

Ned regarded the man with wonder at this sudden and strange behavior.

"What can it mean?" he asked himself—"this extreme agitation at the mere mention of my name?"

Then a sudden flush rose to his brow. There could be but one explanation of it all; these people must be connected in some way with the man who had so wronged his mother before his birth, and were consequently taken aback at being confronted by the son of the man who had been guilty of that wrong.

Ned searched the man's face with an eager eye as these thoughts occurred to him, but he read there only pride, arrogance, and an indomitable will, and was instantly repelled thereby.

Then he turned his glance from him to the frail figure reclining in the berth, and his heart went forth at once to the gentle, sweet-faced woman, for she seemed in every way the opposite of her haughty husband, and was regarding him with a surprised and eager wistfulness that touched him deeply.

"What is it, dear!—why are you so disturbed? What did he say his name is?" she asked, in a gentle, but wondering tone, for she had not distinctly caught the name.

"Heatherton—Edward Heatherton, madam," Ned responded, watching her closely as he said it.

"Heath-er-ton! Why, the same as ours?" she said, catching her breath slightly in pronouncing it.

Ned's heart gave a painful leap at her words.

The name of these people was Heatherton also! He had not thought of that. Could it be possible that they were the parents of his father?"

"Yes—yes," the man here broke in, nervously. "I—I—er—it seemed so strange to me that—that this young man's name should be the same, that I was—was taken quite aback; for there are so few of us, you know. It's a—er—remarkable coincidence," he continued, drawing forth his handkerchief and wiping the perspiration from his crimson face—"don't you think so, captain? Doesn't it strike you so, Mr. and Mrs. Wellington?"—turning to his friends.

Then, without waiting for them to reply, he again addressed himself to Ned, though it was evident that he labored under a painful constraint.

"I am sure we are unspeakably grateful to you, young man, for the inestimable service which you have rendered us to-day; my wife surely would have been drowned but for your promptness and courage. I feel that we must try and make you some return; if—er— if you will do me the honor to let me draw a check for——"

"Sir!" exclaimed Ned, with a mighty heart-throb of repulsion at such a proposal.

Money for a life!

Was the man's soul so mean and sordid that he gauged even human life by dollars and cents? And did he measure his, Ned's character, by the standard of his own vulgar nature?

"Oh! husband!" breathed his more delicately organized wife, while she cast a deprecating look at Ned, as if beseeching him not to be offended, or judge her husband too harshly for his lack of refinement.

"Well, what is it now, Rachel?" he demanded, with a touch of irritation in his tone. "Surely the—the obligation is very great," he added, falteringly, for, in spite of his natural tyrannical nature, his wife was his idol, and it unnerved him whenever he thought of how near he had come to losing her.

"Yes—beyond any price," she murmured, with gentle emphasis. Then, turning again to Ned, she continued, with touching sweetness: "I bless you with all my heart, my young friend. I am more grateful

than I can express for the noble service you have rendered me; for, even though I am growing old, the world and life are very pleasant to me; and be my future years few or many, I shall never forget that I owe them to you."

She held out her delicate hand to him as she ceased speaking, and Ned saw there were tears in her eyes.

Ned took it—what a fair, slender, lady-like hand it was; and a strange thrill crept along the nerve of his arm to his heart. He believed that she was a woman whom he could both love and reverence.

"Believe me, dear madam, I could ask no greater reward for what I have done, than to have won such kindly words from you," he said, with a quiver of emotion in his voice, then, gently releasing her hand, he bowed courteously, but with something of conscious dignity to the other witnesses of the scene, after which he turned and abruptly left the room before any one realized his intentions.

He made his way as quickly as possible from the boat, for he had no wish for any further intercourse with the pompous man who had offered him money, and, taking an omnibus on the landing, was driven directly to Mr. Lawson's cottage, where he exchanged his borrowed clothing for a suit that had been left there the year before, and then sent the captain's back to the boat with a note of thanks for the use of it.

All day long his mind dwelt upon the adventure of the morning, and he was filled with wonder over the strange coincidence of names.

Who were these people? Why had the man been so

overcome upon learning that he too, bore the name of Heatherton? What relationship, if any, did they bear to him?—were some of the queries which both harrowed and preplexed him.

“They are old enough to be my grandfather and grandmother,” he said to himself. “Really, I am half inclined to believe that they are—it would not be so very strange. But,” with a proud uplifting of his handsome head, “I do not want anything to do with them—at least with him—the arrogant, purse proud old aristocrat. That dear old lady was very lovely, though, and I could take her right into my affections. I shall always think of her as a sweet woman, with silver hair and a heart of gold,” he concluded, waxing poetical in his admiration.

“Won’t my mother be surprised when I tell her!” he went on, after a few moments of thought. “I wonder if it will be best for me to tell her. It might stir up those old feelings and make her unhappy; but then I shall have to explain about my wet clothing, so I suppose the truth will have to come out.”

“What! he hasn’t gone!” exclaimed Thomas Heatherton—for the man was none other than he whom Mr. Lawson had followed into the Adams House a few days previous—as the door closed after Ned’s abrupt departure.

“I am afraid you wounded him, Thomas, by offering him money,” said his wife, regretfully.

“Well, and what should I offer him?” demanded her husband, with some excitement.

"We could offer him nothing, as a return for my life, but simple gratitude," she gravely replied.

"But I do not like to rest under such a sense of obligation," responded Mr. Heatherton, restively.

"This is a case where one should be willing to feel the weight of obligation, since for the gift of life one can make no adequate return," murmured Mrs. Heatherton, with tremulous lips.

"Well, you always did have some high-flown notions, which I could never understand; but we will not discuss the matter any further now," her husband replied, as if desirous of dismissing the subject. Then, turning to the captain, he asked: "How long before you go back? We would like to return to Boston with you."

"Just as soon as our freight is discharged and we can load up again," the officer answered; and then he, too, left the room and went about his duties.

Mrs. Heatherton, weak and weary from her accident, slept all the way back to the city, only awaking when the steamer touched her pier in Boston.

When Ned returned and related his adventure—as he concluded it best to do—to his mother and Mr. Lawson, it occasioned no little astonishment and excitement in their minds; and when Mrs. Heatherton was once more alone with him she confided to him the fact of her recent correspondence with Mr. Thomas Heatherton and its result.

"Then he is my grandfather—my father's father—as I suspected!" Ned exclaimed, flushing hotly, for it galled his proud spirit to the quick to know that the

man must have recognized the fact of their relationship the moment he learned his name, and had haughtily ignored it, even in the face of the priceless service which he had rendered him. "Oh, mother, I wish you had never appealed to him," he added, with a sense of humiliation that was very irritating.

"It was only right for him to know that his son was legally married," his mother responded, "and I have always intended, ever since I learned the truth, to assert the fact if I could ascertain the address of Mr. Heatherton. I did not expect to reap any personal benefit by so doing. I did not presume to hope that he would ever acknowledge me as his son's wife and equal; but I did hope that he might be influenced to help you to complete your education, for I do so want you to go to college, Ned," she concluded, wistfully.

"And I want to go to college more than I can tell you," Ned returned, with unwonted seriousness, "but I would scorn to accept any aid from that purse-proud old aristocrat," he concluded, bitterly.

"Do not be acrimonious, dear," his mother said, with gentle reproof. "Perhaps I made a mistake in writing to him that you lacked means to defray your college expenses, and I, too, am sorry that I did; but I do not regret having informed him that his son was legally married to me. I wish we could manage the college problem, though," she concluded, with a sigh.

"I don't think we can, mother," Ned gravely returned; "indeed I have made up my mind to give it up, and ask Mr. Lawson to help me to get into busi-

ness of some kind. Don't look so unhappy about it, mother, dear," he added, assuming a lighter tone, "for I expect to make my fortune by and by, and give you as handsome a carriage and pair as any lady on Beacon or Mount Vernon street possesses."

"I would rather you should have the education than the fortune, Ned; and if I owned the carriage and pair at this moment, they should be sold to send you to college," Miriam responded, with starting tears.

Mrs. Thomas Heatherton awoke very early the next morning, and lay for a long time quietly thinking over the exciting events of the previous day.

She felt somewhat stiff and lame from her fall and struggles in the water, but otherwise was as well as usual, and was reverently grateful to find herself alive and so comfortable, while she was continually haunted by the handsome face and noble bearing of the young man to whom she owed so much.

"Thomas, are you awake?" she asked, as her husband moved restlessly on his pillow.

"Awake! Well, I should say that I am! I don't believe I've slept two blessed hours the whole night through," was the irritable response.

The fact was, he too, had been haunted by the remembrance of the proud young fellow who had so indignantly faced him when he had offered him money, and the tone in which he had given utterance to that one word, "sir!" had rung in his ears all night, and still grated harshly on his nerves.

"The boy is strangely like Dick, upon my word—has the same hair and eyes," he thought, "only Dick

never had that open, straightforward gaze which seems to look one through and through. Gracious! how his eyes burned when he faced me there!"

He was thinking these thoughts when his wife spoke to him.

"I am sorry," she remarked, in reply to his complaint about not having slept. "I have rested beautifully; but, of course, having had so much sleep yesterday, it is not strange that I should wake so early. I have been thinking, Thomas, about that young man——"

"Humph! well, what of him?" grunted Mr. Heatherton.

"About the coincidence of names. As you said yesterday, there are few Heathertons; do you suppose he can be a connection of ours?"

"How should I know?" was the evasive answer.

"To be sure! how should you? But I wish we had questioned him regarding his family. Somehow it struck me that he resembled—Dick?"

The woman's voice trembled over the name, for it had long been a forbidden one in their home.

When Richard Heatherton had returned from college, and certain facts regarding his fast and dissipated career reached his father's ears; when bill after bill, showing the most reckless extravagance, had been presented for payment—when the shameful story, that he had tricked some "low-born" girl into a mock marriage, and trouble and scandal were likely to result from it—was whispered to him, and his son had insolently refused to have anything to say about the mat-

ter, and appeared utterly indifferent regarding any honorable adjustment of his pecuniary liabilities, his father, in a moment of passion, discarded him, telling him never to show his face inside his doors again.

He was the more bitterly incensed, perhaps, because of the refusal of Benjamin Lawson to meet Dick Heatherton's excessive liabilities. He had always professed a great fondness for his only sister's son, and promised to defray the expenses of his education, and also to make him his heir, if he proved worthy. Yet, on hearing of his nephew's misdeeds, he had repudiated the boy, as a "libertine and an ungrateful spend-thrift," telling him and his father that not one dollar of his property would he ever get—it should all be given to some charitable institution instead. A miserable quarrel had ensued between the three, which, together with the fear of trouble from his relations with Miriam Wallingford, resulted in Richard Heatherton suddenly shipping for Australia.

But, a few months later, word had come back to Thomas Heatherton, from the captain of the vessel in which the young man had sailed, that he had suddenly died in mid-ocean of cholera, and been consigned to the depths of the sea on the same day. It was a terrible blow to the proud man, who had built great hopes upon his only son. Money and advantages had been lavishly showered upon him—nothing had been spared with the hope of making him a noble man and fitting him for a high position in life, and for a time his haughty spirit was well-nigh crushed.

His mother grieved like one bereft of all hope of

future happiness, and the sight of her sorrow only tended to embitter her husband a hundred-fold, and he forbade her ever to mention the name of her son in his presence, or allow it to be spoken in their home.

He also forbade all intercourse between Benjamin Lawson and his sister; for, in spite of his knowledge of his son's unworthiness, he could not forgive his brother-in-law for the stand which he had taken against him; and so Mrs. Heatherton, out of the gentleness of her peace-loving nature and strong affection for her husband, yielded to him, hoping that time would eventually heal the breach.

But she did not know the doggedness of his nature—he had never relented, and thus Benjamin Lawson and his sister had never exchanged a word since the day of that wretched quarrel; for the man, feeling that he could not bear to be in the same city with her, and never be allowed to meet her, settled up his business in New York and took his departure for Boston.

Mrs. Heatherton had feared an outburst of passion from her husband, when, on the morning after her accident, she gave utterance, for the first time in long years, to the forbidden name of their son; but some inexplicable impulse had forced it from her, and, finding it so calmly received, waxed even bolder.

"He bears a resemblance to Dick—don't you think so, Thomas?" she ventured.

"Well, maybe, a trifle—the hair and eyes are something like D—— like his," the man muttered.

"Do—do you suppose that—that he could have married after he left home, and—that this Edward Heath-

erton is his—son?" was the next timid inquiry, and it will readily be seen that all knowledge of Richard Heatherton's entanglement with Miriam had been concealed from her.

"'Married after he left home!' how you women do let your imagination run away with your common sense!—you just live upon romance," scornfully retorted her husband. "Dick started for Australia immediately after leaving college, died on board ship, and was buried at sea—rather meagre facts, it seems to me, out of which to rear future generations."

Mrs. Heatherton cringed with pain at his words, and sighed heavily; but, scenting signs of danger ahead in her husband's tone, she subsided, and "Dick" was not mentioned again.

But the gentle old lady "with silver hair and heart of gold," could not forget the handsome, manly fellow who had saved her life, and she often experienced a strange yearning to see and talk with him again.

CHAPTER XIX.

NED SHOWS A LITTLE OF HIS PROUD SPIRIT.

Mr. Thomas Heatherton seemed strangely unlike himself during the day following the accident upon the yacht. He did not go out after breakfast, as usual; he appeared to have no interest in the morning paper but, with a moody brow and dejected air, moped

about, going aimlessly from room to room, scarcely noticing or speaking to his wife throughout the whole forenoon.

But after lunch, he disappeared and Mrs. Heather-ton did not see him again until nearly dinner-time when he came to her, looking much brighter and as if a heavy burden had been rolled from his heart, and proposed that after dinner, they should go for a drive through the new boulevards to Chestnut Hill Reservoir.

She asked no questions, but she could not help wondering what had caused such a marked change in her husband's manner and appearance within a few hours.

That night—by the evening postal delivery—Mrs. Richard Heatherton, of No. —— Mount Vernon street received the following characteristic communication:

Adams House, Boston, July 8th, 18—.

Madam:—While I do not for a moment recognize the relationship which you tried to prove to me a few days since, I am nevertheless compelled to acknowledge the heavy obligation that rests upon me in view of the heroic act of your son in saving my dear wife from drowning. I am also prompted to show my appreciation of the noble deed in some way; and, therefore, in consideration of what you wrote me regarding your desire that he should receive a collegiate education, I wish to say that I will cheerfully bear the expense of such a course to the amount of \$1,000 per year. Inclosed you will find a draft to defray the expenses of the coming year, and a like amount will be forwarded to you every twelve months until your son graduates.

Respectfully yours, Thomas Heatherton.

Miriam Heatherton grew hot with indignation and repulsion, as she read the cold formality and forced appreciativeness of this letter, while a sudden impulse

prompted her to tear the draft into atoms and scatter them to the four winds of heaven.

Then her antagonism was aroused and she was inflamed with a determination to secure Ned's rights at any cost.

"Ned is his grandson—his only heir," she said, with a feeling of strong resentment at his coarse repudiation of the relationship; "it is, therefore, but right that he should have the benefit of this money for his education since he cannot get it in any other way, and I shall try to persuade him to make use of it."

When Ned came in to dinner she told him about the reception of the draft and letter, the substance of which she repeated to him, but expressed in much more friendly language than the haughty man had used.

He listened without comment, until she finished the recital, then he asked, very quietly :

"Let me see the letter, please, mother."

Mrs. Heatherton flushed and fumbled about her work-basket for a moment.

"Here is the check, Ned," she said, passing it to him, while she pretended to be still looking for the letter.

"I do not care anything about the check—it is the letter I want to see," he persisted.

She saw that it would be useless to refuse him, and she was obliged to give it to him, but she did so reluctantly.

He read it through, she watching him closely the while, and she was absolutely frightened to see how white with passion he grew, as he took in the import of the coarse supercilious epistle.

She had never imagined before that he possessed such a temper—it was a startling revelation to her, and a feeling of dismay filled her heart, accompanied by a fear that possibly the taint of the Heatherton had descended to him after all.

“And you wish me to accept such a benefit from a mean, low-spirited craven like that!” he exclaimed, in a tone so fierce and unnatural that she shrank with fear and pain.

“Oh! Ned, don’t—you frighten me!” she cried; “I know it is a cruel and vulgar letter; but I do so want you to go to college, and it seems as if it is your right to have some of this man’s money.”

“My right!” he scornfully repeated; “it is my right to respect myself, and that I never could do if I accepted one dollar from such an old— Well, I will not lower myself to his level by calling names,” he interposed, checking the expression on his lips.

He thought a moment, then continued:

“I will not go to college to be beholden to any man. I have thought that, possibly, I might be able to work my way thorough, with what you have saved to give me a start; but I know it would be very hard, and if I should break down before completing my course I should never be fit for anything else. Even if I should succeed in taking my degree, I should then have to prepare for some profession and that would take at least a couple of years longer. No, I am going into business. I know it will be a great disappointment to you, mother dear,” he added tenderly; “but some of the strongest and grandest men our nation has ever

produced never went to college. I know I can be respected—I know I can attain an honorable position in the world if I strike out for myself and work up in some business; and by making the most of my spare minutes, I can improve myself mentally by taking a good course of reading. Ah! Mr. Lawson!" he exclaimed, as that gentleman entered the room just then, "won't you please come here and help us decide a very important question. But just read this first," and he passed to him the letter that had so aroused his indignation and independence.

Mr. Lawson read the epistle, his thin lips setting rigid lines as he did so; but he made no comment on its contents, simply remarking as he passed it back:

"Well, youngster, it seems that you can go to college if you want to."

"Mr. Lawson!" cried Ned, turning upon him aghast, "do you suppose I would use a single dollar of that money to go to college, or for any other purpose?"

"Well there is no occasion to get excited. What are you going to do with the draft?" the man asked with a twinkle of satisfaction in his gray eyes.

"Return it to Thomas Heatherton by the first mail to-morrow morning of course."

"Humph! I don't think it would hurt Thomas Heatherton to spend a little of his money on you—he has lots of it," Mr. Lawson calmly observed.

"That isn't the point; it would make no difference if he were a Rothschild, I wouldn't soil my conscience and lower my self-respect by accepting his filthy lucre," responded Ned spiritedly.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the little old gentleman as if infinitely amused, "got some of your father's temper, haven't you?"

"Did you ever know my father?" Ned demanded, wheeling around and facing him squarely while he looked greatly astonished.

"Hum—what I meant," the man evasively returned with evident embarrassment, "was that you couldn't have inherited it from your gentle mother here."

"Oh! from the way you spoke you must have known him. I have some temper I'll admit, but I believe that I have some honor with it, which is more than could have been said of him if all accounts are true," Ned responded in a more subdued tone.

Mr. Lawson chuckled to himself, for he enjoyed this manifestation of spirit hugely.

"So you will not accept a college education from your grandfather?" he thoughtfully remarked.

"No, sir," said Ned with a decision which left no room for doubt regarding his resolution.

"Well, you've got the right kind of pluck, my boy," his friend remarked approvingly, "and you can't fail to get on in the world if you use it right. But youngster, you shall go to college, if you want to, and without being beholden to your grandfather. Ben Lawson's got money enough to send half a dozen chaps to Harvard, if he takes a notion; so perhaps what you'd scorn to accept from Tom Heatherton, you wouldn't refuse from an old friend, who's quite fond of you, and who thinks a heap more of you to-day than he ever did before. What do you say?"

Ned and his mother regarded the man with astonishment, for, during all the years they had lived with him they had never known him to express such feeling and friendliness, although they had always been upon the best of terms.

Ned flushed, then paled, for he was deeply touched by the man's kindly proposition, which was a very tempting one.

He did not reply for several moments, and appeared to be thinking deeply, while his face gradually took on a troubled expression.

At last he looked up gravely into the face of his friend, and said:

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Lawson, I am sure, in fact you have always been kind to both my mother and me. But—I have no—no real claim on you, and I feel sensitive about being such an expense to you, as a college course would entail, however economical I might try to be."

"You needn't feel so concerned about the expense, my boy, for I've money enough to put you through in good shape, I reckon; why, as for the matter of claim upon me—why——"

What he had intended to say in this connection was suddenly cut short, for some reason best known to himself.

"It is certainly very friendly of you, sir, and I appreciate your goodness more than I can express," Ned gratefully remarked, without appearing to heed the man's sudden pause. "All the same," he added, with an air of resolute independence, "if you will not be

offended, I—I think I will not go, as I don't just like the idea of being dependent on any one. I am almost of age and, as I have my own way to make in the world, and my mother to take care of, I believe it will be best for me to get into business of some kind right away; if you will be so kind as to use your influence for me in that respect."

"You are sure you will not regret the decision, youngster?" Mr. Lawson inquired in a kindly tone, while he regarded him searchingly. "I'm a lonely old fellow—or should be but for the cheerful home which you and your mother make for me here. I've never had any children, but I think it might be rather pleasant to feel that I had a boy in college and was doing a little good with my money. Better think it over for a while before you settle the matter."

"Thank you again, sir; but, truly, my mind was almost made up before my mother received this letter. I have a fair education already, enough to help me along in a business career. Plainly," Ned went on thoughtfully, "I believe I should not care to be a professional man—I'd like a stirring business, and, as I am situated, I am convinced it would be unwise for me to give four years to a college course when during that time I might be steadily advancing in some good business. I would like to get at work right away," he concluded, energetically.

"All right, youngster. I believe you've a level head on your shoulders; and, according to my way of thinking, college-bred men are not always the smartest nor

the best men. What do you want to get into?" Mr. Lawson inquired with some curiosity.

"I do not know as I am very particular; something in which I'll have a chance to work up with a prospect of being boss myself some time," Ned said, smiling.

"That's the talk! and I'll see that you have a position of some kind before the beginning of another week," the old gentleman replied, and then arose and left the room.

"Smart boy! downright plucky, too! I've half a mind to tell him the truth, make over a handsome income to him, let him go to college and give him a hint about my intention for the future," he muttered as he went slowly down the hall to the library. "Guess I won't just yet," he added after a little thought; "better give him a little more time to show his grit and principle. I want to see how he'll meet the world and its temptations. I'm not sorry he isn't going to college, though I believe he'd do himself credit, and I hated to have him disappointed, but—Dick went to the dogs there and there may be a germ of Heatherton rascality in Ned; though I think he favors his mother rather than his father. No, I'll keep mum for a while longer and let him work his own way, just to prove what kind of stuff he's made of."

That evening Ned begged his mother to allow him to reply to Thomas Heatherton's communication in her place, saying that he was a man now, and competent to speak for himself, while he believed it was his duty to shield her from all such unpleasant business.

She consented, and he indited the following letter:

No. — Mount Vernon street, Boston, July 8th, 18—.

Mr. Thomas Heatherton.

SIR:—Your favor of to-day was duly received, and is herewith acknowledged. While I do not for a moment wish to force upon you the fact of my relationship to you, that fact nevertheless remains. I am the son of your son, and honorably born. Except that it has established my mother's honor beyond your ability to refute it, I regret that the matter should have been mentioned to you at all, or the proofs forwarded to you. I also regret that any fancied obligation on your part, in connection with the accident of yesterday, should weigh heavily upon you. I beg you to believe that the consciousness of having performed, what appeared to me, an obvious duty, and of having saved a precious human life, is of itself all the reward I could desire. Therefore, I return with this the draft for one thousand dollars, which—with similar favors which you proposed for the future—I could not, under any consideration, make use of.

With all due respect,

EDWARD WALLINGTON HEATHERTON.

Mrs. Heatherton feared that this letter was altogether too curt; but Mr. Lawson, to whom Ned also submitted it, said it was all right. It was to the point and no more caustic than the haughty old scamp needed to offset his own insolence.

"But you might at least have thanked him for offering to bear the expense of your education," said Mrs. Heatherton in a tone of gentle reproach.

"But, mother, I didn't feel a bit thankful—my only sensation was one of contempt for the man's insufferable arrogance and despicable desire to rid himself of an unpleasant sense of obligation. So I would not be a hypocrite and pretend to what I do not feel," Ned returned with considerable spirit.

This effectually silenced his mother, for she had always impressed it upon Ned to be honest in everything, and she could not now urge him to violate his principles.

So the letter went its way and created quite a revulsion of feeling on the part of his reluctant grandfather.

"Blast his impudence!" he cried, crimsoning, as he finished reading the independent epistle, the second sentence of which was worded so nearly like the first one of his own.

Then he read it through again, and a queer little smile began to hover about the corners of his mouth.

"Bless me!" he muttered when he finally laid it down, "I can't help liking his spirit after all. He does not wish to force upon me the fact of his relationship—but for the sake of establishing his mother's honor he would prefer that the fact had never been mentioned. He desires no reward for saving a human life, but the approval of his own conscience! Hum! high-toned young man, upon my word! Must have taken it all from his mother, though, for Dick was never troubled with a conscience, or with any scruple about using all the money he could get hold of. Wallingford—yes, that was the girl's name—and he signs the whole of it with evident pride; I am beginning to be interested in the fellow, in spite of myself. I wonder if he will have to give up going to college!—I would like to know, blessed if I wouldn't!"

He soon had an opportunity of satisfying himself upon this point, as we shall see later.

Three days after Ned returned Thomas Heatherton's draft, Mr. Lawson informed him that he could have a position in a certain banking house, which he named, if he was willing to begin upon a low round of the ladder.

"I expected to do that in any business, sir," Ned responded, but looking pleased at the prospect of employment.

Mr. Lawson beamed excessive approbation upon him at this reply.

"That's sensible!" he said. "I've seen chaps—green-horns, of course—who expected to step straight into the salary of an experienced man. It'll be up-hill work for a time, my boy, but one is advanced in proportion to his faithfulness and efficiency."

"I will do the best I can, sir, to justify your recommendations, as well as for my own credit," Ned earnestly answered. Then he asked eagerly, "When shall I begin?"

"Next Monday morning at nine, sharp."

"All right, sir; I will be on hand. Mother," turning to her with a merry twinkle in his eyes, "henceforth behold in your son a man of business—an embryo banker; we'll have that coach-and-pair for you yet."

"Humph! a coach-and-pair!" grunted Mr. Lawson, who did not indulge himself in such luxuries, "you're flying a high kite, seems to me, for a simple bank-runner." Then he added to himself with an inward chuckle: "He always thinks of his mother first, and that's a very good sign."

Ned laughed out lightly at his remark.

"That sounds extravagant to you, doesn't it, Mr. Lawson?" he said, "but I am going to take for my motto 'Aim high, young man,' and who knows but what I may yet be the president of a bank."

"You're modest surely in your aspirations," dryly

remarked Mr. Lawson, then adding, "but such things have happened."

A few days later Thomas Heatherton had occasion to go to the very bank where Ned was employed.

The young man was just leaving the bank on an errand, as his grandfather entered, and a look of surprise and curiosity leaped into Mr. Heatherton's eyes as they met his.

Ned flushed slightly at the encounter, but feeling it would be rude to pass the man without any sign of recognition, he courteously lifted his hat and then went about his business.

"Who was that young fellow who just left the bank?" Mr. Heatherton inquired of the cashier, who counted out the money for his check.

"His name is Heatherton—he's just entered the house to learn the business. He's a fine young chap—smart as a cricket, too, and one who will make his mark yet."

Thomas Heatherton left the building wearing a more thoughtful look than usual.

"Then he's given up going to college," he muttered. "If Dick had been that sort of a fellow, what a comfort he would have been." The sigh that followed this observation told of a heavy heart and blighted hopes, with perhaps mighty yearning for the boy whom his proud heart had refused to acknowledge.

CHAPTER XX.

NED IS BETRAYED INTO A STARTLING CONFESSION.

Ned after gravely thinking the matter over, concluded that he would not go to Nantasket with Mr. Lawson and his mother that summer.

"I cannot afford it," he said; "the fare up and down on the boat every day will be more than my pay will allow. If you are willing, sir," he said to Mr. Lawson, "I would like to sleep here at the house, getting my meals somewhere downtown, during the week, then Saturday nights I will go to Nantasket to spend Sunday with you and my mother."

This arrangement was going to be something of a trial to Mrs. Heatherton, for she had never yet been separated from Ned; but she could both understand and appreciate his feelings. He had reached man's estate and wished to assume man's independence and responsibility; so she did not oppose him, particularly as Mr. Lawson said he would feel much easier to have some one in the house on Mount Vernon street at night while they were away.

So, Mr. Lawson and Mrs. Heatherton went away to the beach together and Ned remained in Boston.

It was rather lonely at first, for he did not have to go downtown until nearly nine in the morning, and he missed the gneial companionship of his mother, the pleasant chats in her room, and her sunny presence in

the house. Then the evenings were long, for his duties were always over at four o'clock and, at first, he hardly knew what to do with himself between then and bedtime.

But it suddenly occurred to him that these long hours would be just the time in which to do some solid reading and study; so he laid in a supply of books and was soon deeply interested in the course which he had marked out for himself, while the time, after that, did not hang nearly so heavily on his hands.

He always went for a stroll on the common or the Public Garden, both of which were within easy distance of Mr. Lawson's house, between eight and nine of the evening; for he fancied that he rested better for this exercise in the open air.

One warm evening about the middle of August, he was a little later than usual in starting out for his walk.

He passed through Walnut street to Beacon, which he crossed, and entered the Common, strolling leisurely along its smooth walks and thinking over what he had been reading before coming out.

The night was cloudy, and it seemed likely to rain, but Ned did not mind the dampness, and, keeping on his way, he finally came out upon the mall running parallel with Tremont street.

There were not as many people as usual abroad—in fact, the mall was almost deserted, but he noticed as he came to the crossing leading to Winter street, that a lady was standing there as if waiting for a car.

He passed her without paying much attention to her except to notice that she was alone. He supposed her

to be some clerk who was belated in getting home after her day's work, and yet, afterward, he remembered that he had been impressed with something familiar about her figure.

He went on for perhaps half a dozen rods, when he saw a man cross the street to the very entrance where the lady was waiting, and, instinctively, he wheeled about to watch him. He then noticed that he stopped close beside the lonely figure and peered curiously into her face, whereupon Ned began to feel his blood tingle with indignation at his rudeness, and he walked slowly back beneath the shadow of the trees.

"You're a thundering pretty girl, miss," he heard the man remark in a wheedling tone.

The lady instantly retreated a few steps from him, without deigning to make any reply.

He followed her.

"Come now, don't be shy," he continued in the same tone as before; "give us a kiss and then I'll see you home. You won't?" as she put forth one hand in repelling gesture—"Well, now—I ain't in the habit of being put off when I've set my heart on anything and I guess you will," and he threw out his arm as if to infold her in his foul embrace.

"Oh! help!" cried an agonized voice that aroused all Ned's reverence and championship for womanhood, and the next moment the insulting wretch lay sprawling on the ground at the girl's feet.

Ned had heard every word which the craven had uttered, and, feeling that the woman, whoever she might be, would need his protection, he had quietly

approached, and at that agonized appeal, sprang across the mall, striking out boldly from the shoulder, hitting the villain a powerful blow just behind the ear, thus rendering him powerless, for a few moments at least, to do any one any harm.

Then he turned his attention to the lady.

"I hope he hasn't frightened you very badly," he began, when with a sudden heart-bound of consternation, he cried out, appalled, "Gertrude! how do you happen to be here and alone, at this time of the night?"

"Oh, Ned! Ned!" was all that the terrified girl could say as she clung tremblingly to his arm, and completely unnerved.

"There, poor child! do not tremble so, for you are perfectly safe with me," Ned said in a soothing tone, for she was shivering and almost sobbing from excitement, and the reaction caused by finding herself under the protection of a friend.

But his attention was diverted from her for a moment just then, for the fallen man had come to himself and was scrambling to his feet.

"Well, sir, what do you want now?" Ned inquired as he approached him, brandishing the arms and muttering threats of vengeance. "Have a care or you will find the recent operation repeated," he warningly added.

He gently put Gertrude behind him and assumed a threatening attitude as the fellow drew nearer.

"Don't strike!" whined the wretch appealingly.

Then as Ned dropped his arms by his side, he crept,

in a sneaking way, still nearer, and peered curiously up into his face.

"I only want to know you the next time I see you," he said, meekly, but with a veiled threat in his words, then starting suddenly back astonished, "Ned Wallingford! by gosh!" he cried. "Curse you!" he continued, fiercely, "you head me off at every turn, but I swear I will get even with you yet."

"Yes, Bill," for the fellow was Bill Bunting, "it is I," Ned replied, scarcely less surprised than his old-time enemy, "and I shall continue to head you off at every evil turn, when ever I can. You may be very sure also, that I shall not let you off as easy as this, if I ever catch you repating the offence of to-night. Now the sooner you go about your own business the better it will be for you, for there comes a policeman."

Bill turned sullenly away, muttering threats of vengeance, while Ned drew Gertrude's trembling hand within his arm and made her lean upon him.

"I think a car is coming that will take us to the corner of Arlington street. Shall I stop it?" he asked, as a Back Bay electric car came rolling along.

"No, please, if you will not mind walking with me a little way until I get a trifle more calm," the young girl replied, tremulously, "I do not feel like facing a car full of people in such an excited state."

She was still very much unnerved, and clung to Ned's arm as if she feared some fresh danger ahead.

"I will walk with you as far as you wish," Ned said, reassuringly, "indeed I shall not leave you until you are safe at your own door."

Gertrude informed him that she had been at Clifton, spending a week with her Aunt Annie. She had started for Boston that afternoon, but an accident to the engine had delayed the train. Through a blunder on reaching the city, she had taken the wrong street car, and it was only after riding a few squares that she had discovered her error. She had got out of the car and was waiting for one which would carry her there, when the incident we have described occurred.

During the long walk Ned and Gertrude found many pleasant themes to talk about, but the chief one was a mutual declaration of love, which convinced both that Heaven had destined them to cherish each other for life.

It is not strange, therefore, that the walk to Arlington street seemed short to both of them, especially as they had opened their hearts to each other, recalling the past, and suggesting plans for the future.

When they finally reached Mr. Langmaid's residence, Gertrude asked Ned if he would come in.

"Yes," he answered gravely, "I want to see your father."

"Ned! are you going to tell him?" Gertrude exclaimed.

"Certainly; I have perhaps betrayed my feeling somewhat prematurely; but since the die is cast, I could not consent to anything of a clandestine nature, and so I am going to tell him the truth," Ned returned, with his usual straightforwardness.

"Papa is a kind and generous man," Gertrude said, thoughtfully, "and I know he likes you."

"That may be; but he may not approve of an en-

gagement between us, while my future prospects are so uncertain. I want to have a frank talk with him and know just where I stand," Ned replied; and Gertrude respected him all the more for assuming such an honorable attitude.

CHAPTER XXI.

NO ENGAGEMENT FOR TWO YEARS.

Accordingly Ned went into the house with Gertrude, and was warmly greeted by both Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid.

They expressed much surprise, however, over Gertrude's appearance at that late hour, for they had given up seeing her that night, supposing that her aunt had persuaded her to remain another day at Clifton.

The fair girl explained the circumstances of her detention, while she shrewdly made much of her lover's heroism in relating how he had come to her rescue, when she was accosted by the bold wretch, on the Common.

"You should have taken a carriage—never take the horse or electric cars when you happen to be out alone after dark," her father exclaimed, with considerable excitement.

Gertrude flushed and shot a sly smile at Ned, who comprehended its meaning.

"I suppose it would have saved me the fright of meeting that wretch," she demurely remarked, while in

her heart she was saying, "If I had taken a carriage I should not have met Ned—I should not have been the happy girl to-night that I am."

They chatted pleasantly in a general way for a half hour or more, then Ned arose to go.

He bade Mrs. Langmaid and Gertrude good-night and Mr. Langmaid then attended him to the door.

When they reached the hall Ned turned to his companion and inquired:

"Can I have a few moments' private conversation with you, sir?"

"Certainly," the gentleman responded, but looking a trifle surprised by the request. "Come this way," and he led him to a small reception room off the hall.

"I have a confession to make to you, Mr. Langmaid," Ned began in a frank, manly way, though he colored with something of embarrassment; and then he told his story with a straightforwardness that did him great credit.

"I have loved Gertrude for a long time," he said in conclusion, "but I did not intend to declare it to her until I had won a position in the world which would warrant me in asking her to be my wife; but the circumstances of this evening—her fear, her dependence upon and confidence in me, somehow broke down all barriers and I had confessed my affections for her almost before I was aware of it."

Mr. Langmaid listened in unbroken silence throughout Ned's recital and looked so grave and thoughtful over it that the young lover's heart almost failed him.

"I am free to confess," he remarked, when Ned had

concluded, "that I should have preferred this should not have occurred until Gertrude had seen a little more of the world. She is not yet through with her education and has yet to come out, when she will be liable to receive attentions from other young men. If she should then discover that she had made a mistake, this episode would doubtless mar both her life and yours with painful memories. Still, Ned," the gentleman added, with a genial smile, "you are a lad after my own heart, as far as moral worth goes, and I should be proud of you in that respect as a son. I honor you exceedingly for your conscientious confession to-night, even though I consider that you have been somewhat premature in declaring yourself to Gertrude. If she loves you, however, I shall not spoil her life by telling her that she cannot be your wife. But you are both very young—too young to think of marriage for some time to come. You have your future to carve out, and I claim that no man should marry until he can provide a home, even though it be an humble one, for the woman whom he loves. There is a possibility also," he continued, with a roguish twinkle in his eyes, "that you may both change your minds when you come to see more of the world. I do not say you will, but such things have happened before now, and I shall stipulate that you wait two years before I sanction any engagement between you. At the end of that time, if you remain constant to each other—if you are still the worthy fellow that you are now and show yourself capable of providing comfortably for my daughter, you shall have her. Meantime, Gertrude will be away, most of the time en-

gaged in study; she is going to Halifax to a select boarding-school for young ladies that is under the management of an intimate friend of Mrs. Langmaid's."

Two years and no troth—no engagements!

This stipulation seemed rather hard to Ned, but his better judgment told him that Mr. Langmaid was right about it and that it would ill-become him to murmur against his decision.

He had met his confession with so much kindness and consideration, he knew he ought to feel grateful to him, and he did, at the same time it seemed a little severe to be told that he could have no claim upon Gertrude for two long years and his face plainly betrayed his disappointment and dejection.

"Do you think me somewhat tyrannical?—that I have imposed hard conditions?" Mr. Langmaid asked, smiling at his long face.

"I am sure I ought not question your wisdom regarding the matter, and you have been very kind. But—but if you will permit no engagement—if I am to have no claim upon Gertrude what are our relations to be toward each other?" Ned inquired with some anxiety, then added: "Are we never to meet? Am I not to be allowed to visit her during her vacation at home? Is there to be no correspondence, and are we forbidden to give free expression of our affection for each other?"

"Those are pertinent questions surely," Mr. Langmaid returned, with a little smile of amusement, "and I can appreciate your anxiety regarding such matters, for I am not unmindful of my own youthful days, when I became very fond of a certain young lady. You can

visit Gertrude here, when she is at home, and we, as a family, will give you a cordial welcome; but," with a twinkle in his eyes, "I should not be in favor of private and protected sessions. I should not object to a friendly correspondence, but there must be no 'love-making' at present. In a word, Ned, I cannot accord you the privilege of an engaged couple for two years to come; your own good sense will tell you what I mean by that, and I shall trust to your honor not to overstep the bound I have prescribed. If, at the end of this time you are both of the same mind as now, and your prospects warrant it, I will give you *carte blanche*, so to speak, for the future."

"Thank you, sir," Ned said, as he arose to go; "I will try not to violate any of the conditions which you have imposed upon me, while, as for my future prospects, I promise you that I shall put forth my strongest efforts toward attaining a position worthy of your daughter's acceptance."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," cautioned his companion, with a smile. "What is it that the wise man says about 'him that maketh haste to be rich'?"

Ned flushed slightly although he knew that Mr. Langmaid intended no reflection upon him, by referring to that proverb. It had only been spoken in jest, nevertheless it stung him a little.

"You need not fear," he said, straightening himself. "I shall never commit a dishonorable act for the sake of getting rich. I should prefer to remain poor all my days—I could never enjoy using money which had been fraudulently obtained."

"Stick to those principles, Ned, and you will always have a friend in William Langmaid as long as we both live," the gentleman heartily responded, as he shook hands with him, then attending him to the door, he bade him good-night and Ned went back to the lonely house in Mount Vernon street in a more blissful frame of mind than he had ever known before.

Time passed, and when New Year's came there was a pleasant surprise for Ned. As he had conducted himself faithfully and efficiently—he was promoted to a more honorable position in the bank with an increase of salary.

One Saturday afternoon, late in February, Ned persuaded his mother to go with him to see Denman Thompson in "The Old Homestead."

It was seldom that he could entice her to any such place of amusement, for she did not enjoy being in a crowd; but to-day, she yielded to his entreaties and Ned was delighted, as the drama proceeded, to see how highly entertained she appeared to be with that very interesting play.

When the play was over, and they were leaving the theatre, they were obliged to stop and wait a little, in the foyer, for the crowd was so great.

As they were standing there, so close together, Ned suddenly felt a terrible shock go over his mother, while a stifled cry of intense pain that had a note of horror in it, broke from her.

He turned to see what caused it, and was startled to find her deathly pale.

"What is it, mother? Are you ill?" he anxiously asked.

"Oh! Ned! Ned!" she wailed, with one hand pressed hard over her heart, then sank a dead weight into his arms.

CHAPTER XXII.

A "WESTERN GENTLEMAN" SUDDENLY APPEARS IN
BOSTON SOCIETY.

At that same instant—Ned remembered it afterward though he did not pay much attention to the circumstance at the time—some one near them uttered a startled oath.

Then two or three gentlemen stepped forward and offered to assist Ned in removing his mother from that stifling place into the open air.

He thankfully accepted their aid, the crowd parted to let them pass, and Mrs. Heatherton was quickly borne out of the building to the sidewalk, where Ned found a carriage greatly to his relief.

Into it he put his mother, who was now beginning to recover, and gave the order to be driven as quickly as possible to Mount Vernon street.

Mrs. Heatherton rallied almost immediately, for the air was cold and frosty and Ned had lowered a window.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she faintly asked, and looking around with a dazed expression.

"You fainted, mother, and I had to get a carriage to take you home," Ned explained.

Mrs. Heatherton sat erect with a startled air and put her hand to her head.

"Ah, yes—I know. Did you see——? Ah——!" she cried, incoherently, then sank back again among the cushions looking as if she was going to faint again.

Ned felt greatly alarmed for her ghastliness was something fearful.

"What is the matter?" he anxiously inquired. "Did I see what? Why did you faint, mother?"

"It—it was very close, wasn't it?" she remarked, weakly.

"Yes; but you are not in the habit of fainting. What was it you wanted to know if I saw?" Ned asked.

"I—ah!—anything of—my fan," responded Mrs. Heatherton turning restlessly away from his questioning glance and beginning to search for the missing article herself.

"Why, yes—here it is; I captured it and your handkerchief just as you were falling," he said, handing the articles to her, then added: "But surely with this cold air blowing on you, you do not need a fan!"

"No, but I did not like to lose it—it is one I have had a long time," she responded, with a weary sigh, as she again fell weakly back among the cushions.

"Do you feel ill again?" Ned inquired, very uneasy about her, for he thought she acted exceedingly strange.

"Oh, no, I am getting better every moment," she said; then, as if desirous of turning his attention from herself, she began to talk of something else.

They were not long in getting home, when Mrs. Heatherton went directly to her room, first telling Ned to ask Mr. Lawson to excuse her from dinner, as she did not feel quite able to come down, and thought it would be better for her to go directly to bed.

This troubled Ned greatly. But the next morning his mother appeared quite herself again, excepting a slightly heavy look about the eyes and Ned's fears subsided.

The remainder of the winter passed without the occurrence of anything worthy of note. Spring opened once more, the trees on the Common commenced to leave out and Ned, with a thrill of joy in his heart, told himself that Gertrude would soon be home again.

She came the last of June looking lovelier, to his fond eyes than ever.

Her year at school had done her good in many ways.

She was the picture of health; there was an added air of refinement and culture about her, which told of study and the faithful training of careful teachers; while there was also a suggestion of maturity and womanly dignity, which made her ten-fold more charming than she had ever been. Their first meeting was very quiet, and in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid, but one glance into the gleaming blue eyes told the young lover that her heart was still true to its first love—there was no evidence of the possible change which her father had suggested.

He saw her frequently, for a time, after that, for some of her friends, who had not yet gone out of town,

gave little receptions in honor of her return, and Ned was also bidden to these festivities.

Gertrude created quite a little breeze of excitement with her beauty among the young gentlemen, whom she met upon these occasions, and from whom she received marked attention; indeed she appeared to be the bright particular star among the galaxy of fair maidens with whom, strange to say, she was also a favorite.

Ned was not of a jealous disposition and did not begrudge her the attention and admiration she received; but he did wish that the restrictions laid upon him had not been quite so rigid.

Mr. Langmaid's word was law unto him, however; for two years he was to appear to the world only as a friend of the family and he would not violate that gentleman's confidence in him by taking advantage of the privileges he enjoyed in being invited to festivities where he met Gertrude.

One evening he was bidden to a reception given by some neighbors of the Langmaids—the Hortons—and as a sort of farewell party to them before their departure for the mountains, and he went little dreaming of the surprise in store for him.

When Ned entered the drawing-room, he went, as was his duty, directly to his hostess, to whom he made his bow and was presented to the Misses Horton, with whom he chatted for a few minutes, after which he felt free to look about for Gertrude who, he felt sure, must have already arrived as he was a little late.

He could not find her in the drawing-room and began to fear that something had prevented her from

coming as he saw her father and mother were both present.

He wandered about for a while, greeting people here and there, then thought he would go into the conservatory, for Ned was very fond of flowers and he knew that the Hortons always had a fine collection.

But, as he drew near the door leading into it from the hall, he suddenly came upon a sight which drove every drop of blood from his face and made his heart stand still with mingled indignation and dismay.

Gertrude was standing framed in the arch of the doorway with all the wealth of flowers and foliage as a background to the picture and looking unusually lovely—a veritable symphony—in blue and silver.

Her dress was the prettiest thing Ned had ever seen her wear.

The material was a delicate shade of blue—very thin and gauzelike—striped off with tiny threads of silver. The lining to the corsage had been cut low, but the gauze was carried up high on the neck at the back and sloped away in a V in front, being finished with a full ruffle of chiffon embroidered with silver. The sleeves came to the elbow and were also edged with the same ruffling, while long pearl-gray gloves came up to meet them. The skirt was very artistically draped and caught here and there with silver daisies. Similar ornaments gleamed amid her bright hair and were clasped around her white neck.

She was wondrously fair to look upon, Ned thought. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, smiles parted her delicate red lips, just revealing her small teeth that

were like two rows of milk-white corn, and her blue eyes were sparkling with animation.

She was chatting with a tall young man of fine figure and who was dressed in the height of style.

A diamond of purest water gleamed upon his shirt-front; his cuff buttons were set with the same precious stones and another gleamed upon the little finger of his left hand, from which he had removed his glove, with the evident intention of displaying the stone.

Ned's face plainly expressed the amazement he experienced upon beholding this young exquisite.

"What does it mean!" he exclaimed under his breath, as he drew back a little to take another look at the man. "Who could ever have believed there could have been such a change in any one! and yet if one studied his face closely and analyzed his features, the coarseness of his nature was unmistakably apparent. But how came he here? Where did he ever get the money to deck himself out in that style? for those are real diamonds and his suit is of the finest broadcloth! I am confounded!"

Then his face grew dark and stern, hard lines settled about his mouth, as he saw Gertrude look up into her companion's face, make some spirited retort to a remark that he had just made, and then laugh out musically.

"She does not know—she cannot dream who he is, or she would not stand there talking with him an instant," Ned muttered, almost fiercely, while his hands shut together convulsively, his nails making great dents in his palms.

Then, as if longer unable to endure the tableau which had wrought him up to such a state of excitement, he approached the couple he had been watching.

Gertrude glanced up as he drew near and instantly her face changed; the brilliant smile softened, her eyes deepened into tenderness, and a slight tremulousness about her lips betrayed how all her pulses had quickened at the sight of him.

Ned was quick to mark these signs and his own face involuntarily brightened.

"Oh, Ned, you have come at last!" she exclaimed, as, with outstretched hand, she started forward to greet him.

Her companion glanced up at her words and movement, whereupon he gave a great start of surprise, while with an expression of dismay, equal to Ned's upon seeing him, overspread his face, and a low, scarcely audible whistle of astonishment escaped his lips.

"Wallingford! by thunder!" he muttered with a frown of hate, "and she acts as though they were mighty good friends, if not something nearer."

"How long have you been here, Ned?" Gertrude inquired, as she laid her hand confidently in his. "I have been watching for you ever since we arrived."

"I have but just come and came to look for you immediately after paying my addresses to the Hortons," Ned replied, while unconsciously he clung to the hand she had given him, as if to hold her back from some fancied danger.

She flushed, for he had always guarded against any

demonstration of affection, especially when they met in public.

"We came over early, at Mrs. Horton's request," she remarked, "and I have just been introduced to a Western gentleman who is on a visit to Boston. Come and let me present you to him—he is exceedingly jolly and original," she concluded, in a low tone.

If Ned had not been so excessively annoyed he would have laughed aloud at what she told him regarding her new acquaintance.

"A Western gentleman on a visit to Boston!" and he was "very jolly and original!"

Truly the mutations of fortune were something wonderful, while but for the hum of voices all about them, the sound of delicious music in the adjoining room and the touch of Gertrude's clinging hand, he would have believed that he had dreamed what he had seen and heard.

"I do not think I care to be introduced to him," he said, bending his lips to her ear. "Come with me, Gertrude—I have something to tell you."

"Yes—but just wait one moment," she replied, then turning back to her recent companion, she remarked with her customary courtesy, "I shall be obliged to ask you to excuse me now."

The gentleman made a profound obeisance.

"Certainly," he briefly returned, then abruptly wheeled about and disappeared within the conservatory, an evil scowl disfiguring his low forehead.

Gertrude turned and walked slowly down the hall

with Ned, and the fair girl was quick to notice that something had gone wrong with her lover.

"Is anything the matter, Ned?" she questioned, lifting a pair of anxious eyes to his grave, perplexed face.

His brow cleared at the query and he smiled fondly down upon her.

"Nothing that need trouble you, or that I shall not soon recover from," he said; then added: "I have had something of a shock this evening!"

"A shock! Of what nature?" she asked, regarding him gravely.

"I will explain it to you presently; but first tell me who is the gentleman with whom you were conversing just now?"

"His name is Hunting."

"Hunting!"

"Yes. He is said to be a very wealthy gentleman from California. He must be quite talented too, for he has invented a valuable pump of some kind—I believe it is for the purpose of exhausting air from certain receptacles which must be air-tight. Papa met him a few weeks ago when he was returning from New York and became quite interested in his invention. He is trying to form a stock company for the purpose of introducing his pumps in a practical way and——"

"Has Mr. Langmaid purchased any of the stock?" Ned interposed, a strange expression on his fine face.

"I believe so—quite a great deal; or at least he is negotiating for it, for he believes the invention to be a very valuable one," Gertrude answered. Then she ex-

claimed: "Why, Ned, what makes you stare so strangely? One would think you knew something against the man."

"And I do, Gertrude," Ned gravely returned.

"Oh, what is it?" she exclaimed, astonished.

"I am afraid Mr. Langmaid is being made game of and will lose every dollar which he intrusts in the hands of that rascal," Ned continued, with some excitement. "For, Gertrude," he impressively concluded, "the man's name is not 'Hunting.'"

"Not Hunting! what can you mean Ned! How do you know—who is he then?"

"He is no other than Bill Bunting, the cowardly bully who knocked me down the first time I ever saw you, the thief who stole your dog Budge, and the low wretch who insulted you on the Common a little less than a year ago."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOE MEETS FOE.

"Ned, you cannot mean it! Surely you are mistaken!" Gertrude exclaimed, while she suddenly grew crimson with mingled mortification and indignation.

"Certainly I mean it," Ned gravely asserted. "Let us sit here"—drawing her aside to a sofa under the great staircase, where they would not be so conspicuous—"and I will prove the truth of what I have told

you. Did you not observe how startled he appeared when he turned just now and saw me?"

"No, I noticed nothing peculiar in his manner?"

"Well, he was evidently as much surprised to find me here, as I was to discover him a guest in Mrs. Horton's house——"

"And Mrs. Horton has taken stock in the pump, too," said Gertrude, interrupting him.

"Well, the pump may be all that it is represented to be," Ned said, thoughtfully, "and those who have invested in it may get their money back; but I shall surely warn them to beware of intrusting much with such a character. Bill Bunting has been a low, unprincipled fellow ever since I first knew him, more than ten years ago."

"And I have been chatting with that treacherous wretch this evening, as with a friend and equal!" breathed Gertrude, with blazing cheeks, and looking greatly distressed.

"Well, I presume he did not recognize you any more than you did him, for it was so dark that evening when he insulted you on the Common, that you could not see each other distinctly," Ned soothingly rejoined, then continued, musingly: "But it is a mystery to me how he ever got money enough together to cut such a swell as he appears to-night—how he ever wormed himself into polite society! He is dressed as stylishly and expensively as any in the house—his diamonds are bona fide, and very fine ones, too, if I am any judge, while to the superficial observer he would seem like a person accustomed to scenes in high life, when, in truth,

he is only an ignorant boor who has been reared amid the slums of Boston."

"That accounts for some of his queer expressions, which were really quite ungrammatical, but which I believed to be provincialisms or Western dialect," said Gertrude, with an expression of intense disgust. "Oh, Ned, is it not strange that people are not more particular about the character and antecedents of strangers, and thus guard their homes and their families from such audacious adventurers?"

"It is strange, but it is a sad and disgraceful fact that money will take a person without either brains or respectability into society which would utterly scorn to receive a genius, if he were poor. I am not speaking from personal experience, however," Ned added, with a slight smile, "for I have no money and I am far removed from being a genius—I am conscious that I owe my entree to these circles to the favor of my good friends, the Langmaids."

"Hush, Ned; you shall not depreciate yourself," Gertrude said, reprovingly, "and, say what you please, there are some people in the world who value others for their real worth, regardless of their lack of fortune."

"Yes, but they are few and far between. As a rule people are rated according to the magnitude of their bank account, or the show they can make in the world. But it puzzles me to imagine how Bill Bunting managed to get such a start—for he was reared amid the most abject poverty," Ned concluded, reflectively.

Gertrude shivered when she thought that she had

graciously given the wretched fellow her hand upon being introduced, listened to his compliments, and even indulged in playful repartee with him.

* * * * *

Mr. William Hunting, alias Bill Bunting—for the Western dude was no other—had been no less startled upon beholding Ned a guest in Mr. Horton's house, than our young hero himself over his appearance there.

"Wallingford! by thunder!" had been his astonished exclamation, as he slunk out of sight into the conservatory, and never having learned of the change in Ned's name.

Then, stationing himself behind a palm tree, he watched the lovers as they walked away.

As we know, he had shrewdly surmised, by the sudden flush on Gertrude's cheek and her greeting of Ned, that they were lovers, and now, as he stood covertly watching them, an evil light leaped into his eyes, and a cruel smile wreathed his sensual lips.

"How did he ever get into such a swell crowd as this?" he muttered with a scowl. "He is the last person on earth I should have expected to meet here. Perhaps some 'half-brother' has left him a petroleum well also! ha! ha! I wonder what he has been up to all these years—him! I haven't forgotten that there are several old scores to be settled between us."

He could see them plainly in their retreat under the stairs, and continued to watch them, a malicious look on his dark face, until they arose to join the dancers.

"Aha!" he muttered, as he saw Ned slide his arm

about the slender waist of his companion, while she shot a bewildering smile and glance up at him. "I'll head that business off yet. I'll be even with you, sir, for all of your infernal meddling in the past. I shall owe you another, too, for this night, for, of course, you're going to tell all you know about me, and there'll be the devil to pay," he concluded, with a frowning brow.

But, as Ned had assured the fair girl, he did not suspect that Gertrude was the lady whom he had insulted on the Common the previous year.

It had been a dark, cloudy evening, and, there having been no light near where she stood, he had not been able to get a distinct view of her face, consequently he had not recognized her upon being introduced by Mrs. Horton, nor dreamed that she could ever have known anything regarding his previous history.

She had changed greatly since, five or six years before, she had identified him as the thief who stole the lady's purse on Atlantic avenue, and thus doomed him to serve out a sentence in the reformatory, and he had no suspicion as he stood there among the flowers talking with her, that she was the same girl.

He knew that she was beautiful and fascinating; he knew that her father was rated a very wealthy man—that she was his only child and heir prospective; accordingly he had conceived an inflexible purpose to win her and her wealth, if such a thing could, by any means, be accomplished.

Later in the evening he presented himself before her, when she happened to be alone for a moment, and

there was a strange glitter in his dusky eyes as he remarked, in an insinuating tone:

"I have come to claim the honor of Miss Langmaid's hand for the next quadrille."

Gertrude flushed, but there was also a resolute sparkle in her own eyes as she lifted them for an instant to his face with a defiant sweep of her lashes.

"You will excuse me—I do not feel disposed to dance," she said, briefly and coldly.

"Pardon; but Miss Langmaid forgets—she allowed me to write her name upon my card against this quadrille," he persisted, with outward politeness, though a dull, angry red mounted to his brow.

"True, but I must ask you to excuse me," Gertrude repeated.

"Certainly, if you are indisposed," he said, still courteous and with a low bow turned away from her, but with his teeth gritting savagely to keep back the stream of profanity which leaped so naturally to his lips whenever he was angered or opposed.

"Another to add to the old score for you, Ned Wallingford," he revengefully muttered.

Feeling too uncomfortable after this rebuff to remain longer, he quietly made his way from the room and mounted the stairs to the dressing-room to get his hat and cane, with the intention of leaving the house immediately.

He had just reached the upper hall when he suddenly came face to face with Ned, who had been to the ladies' dressing-room to get a light wrap for Gertrude.

"So! we meet again," Bill Bunting hissed between

his closed teeth, his upper lip curling like a vicious dog's. "But I'd advise you to keep clear of my track, if you don't wish to get into trouble."

"I have no wish to interfere in any way with you or your plans, so long as you do not trespass upon ground which I feel it my duty to protect," Ned quietly but meaningly responded.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Bill, in a defiant tone.

"Just what I have said," was the cool retort. "Doubtless your memory of the past is as good as mine, and you can govern yourself accordingly. If you come in the way of my duty toward any one, I shall not hesitate to put you out of it with all possible speed."

"You speak very confidently of your powers—as if you consider yourself capable of doing great things," sneered his enemy, with that same vicious curl of his upper lip that Ned had noticed before.

"I believe in deeds rather than words, as you perhaps have cause to remember," Ned calmly returned.

"Curse you! I am no longer the poor beggar I used to be, let me tell you," Bill fiercely said. "I have it in my power, perhaps, to make you repent your insolence. Look out for yourself, Ned Wallingford! I swear you shall not be many years older before you find yourself beneath my heel."

But his threats were like so many idle words to Ned. He did not experience the slightest fear of him—the fellow seemed so far beneath him, both morally and mentally, that his only desire was to get away from him—to ignore him utterly.

With this feeling he passed him, without deigning him any reply, and with something of hauteur in his manner, and was half-way down stairs before Bill realized that he had been quietly snubbed.

This cavalier treatment galled him beyond endurance.

"Look here, Wallingford!" he cried, in a voice of concentrated passion.

Ned paused in his descent, and half turned, waiting to hear what further he might have to say, but did not glance back at him.

"Look here!" the enraged man commanded, fiercely. But as Ned still kept his eyes obstinately turned the other way, he went on maliciously:

"Maybe you think I don't know you are sweet on Miss Langmaid; but a beggar like you can't stand much chance with her proud papa, and—listen, will you? I mean to head you off in that direction if it is in the power of mortal man to do it."

Ned flushed to his brows at this coarse threat, then paled to startling whiteness.

In an instant he was back over the stairs he had but just traversed, and stood towering above his enemy and looking down into his face with a glance that sent a thrill of fear creeping through every cowardly nerve in his body.

"Look here, you!" he said, in a voice so cold and quiet that no one, not looking into his eyes, would have dreamed what a volcano of wrath was just ready to burst all bounds and pour its scorching lava tide upon the head of the craven before him. "If you ever utter

that lady's name in my presence again—if I ever know of your using it anywhere lightly or disrespectfully—if you ever presume to obtrude yourself upon her, or annoy her by your attentions, I will thrash you beyond recognition for a month. I hope you understand me."

And the look which accompanied his threat made Bill Bunting cower visibly before him, in spite of his assumed bravado, for he knew that it was no idle menace.

Ned did not wait for any reply, but quietly descended to the drawing-room, and sought Gertrude once more.

"The —— proud beggar!" muttered Bill, as, instinctively his hand sought the very spot where Ned had hit him that effective blow the previous summer. "I've no wish to feel the force of those iron-capped knuckles again—you were always too spry for me in an open fight, but—I'll strike you yet in the dark and where you'll feel it the most."

He stood revolving some thought in his mind for a few moments, then he added, with a cruel, malignant look:

"Hum—if we can only pump the Langmaid well dry, the pretty fawn will have to go elsewhere to drink."

With these words he hastily quitted the house, without observing the ceremony of wishing his host and hostess good-evening, if indeed he realized that such a curtesy was required of him.

The further trials of the persons in this story is fully told in the sequel to this entitled "A Shadowed Hap-

piness," published in handsome cloth binding uniform with this volume.

(THE END.)

WILD OATS

Part 2

(A SHADOWED HAPPINESS)

CHAPTER I.

A PAIR OF ARCH-PLOTTERS.

A few days after the party at the Hortons, Ned was passing through Park street to Tremont, on his way to the bank, when, just as he was turning the corner, he ran squarely against two men coming from the opposite direction.

"Hi, there, Wallingford! look out for yourself!" cried the familiar but insolent voice of Bill Bunting.

But the supercilious warning had come too late, for, in the collision, a package which Bill's companion had in his hands was thrown to the ground.

"I beg pardon, sir," Ned politely said, and addressing the stranger, while he stooped to recover the package and restored it to him.

As he lifted his glance to his face, he found himself looking into a pair of keen, piercing eyes, which seemed to measure him instantly and read him through and through.

He was a man perhaps forty-five years of age, with a dark, swarthy skin, black hair and beard thickly sprinkled with gray, the sharpest black eyes Ned had ever seen, and features that would have been good but

for the gross look which long years of dissipation had given them.

His form was well proportioned, he was neatly, even richly dressed, and had the air of a thorough man of the world.

He received the package from Ned without a word of thanks or response to his apology, for he appeared to be absorbed in studying his face, and the young man, with a slight bow, passed quickly on his way, for he was desirous of avoiding an interview with his old-time enemy.

"Cool one, isn't he?" sneered Bill to his companion.

"Who is he?" the man inquired, with evident interest.

"A fellow by the name of Wallingford."

"Wallingford!" repeated the stranger. "Humph! that's rather a high-sounding name!"

"Yes, and a proud beggar he is, too," snarled Bill, with a frown.

"A beggar?—he doesn't look it. He was evidently too well dressed and too well bred for a pauper. There was quite an air of dignity too, about him."

"Yes, a —— sight too much for a fellow in his position," retorted Bill.

"What does he do for a living?"

"I believe he has something to do in a bank."

"A bank, eh!" repeated the man, with a start and a greedy gleam in his fiery eyes. "What bank?"

"The —— National," returned Bill, with a malignant scowl.

"You don't appear to be upon very friendly terms

with the young man," remarked his friend, with the glimmer of a sarcastic smile beneath his heavy mustache.

"You can bet I ain't—blast him!"

"What has he done to you?"

"He's always been in my way," and Bill proceeded to recount the various occasions upon which Ned had interfered with his plans, and got him into trouble—giving, of course, his own version of the story.

"And this Miss Langmaid?" questioned the stranger, with an air of deep anxiety, when Bill concluded his recital. "I hope she isn't the daughter of the man who is going to take stock in the pump."

"Well, she is."

An expression of dismay swept over the man's features.

"Then we'll lose him!" he said, in a sharp, angry tone.

At this remark Bill grinned and shoved his tongue into his cheek in a most significant manner.

"It's too late for that for I have his check for twenty shares in my pocket," he said, exultingly. "I went for him the first thing the next morning, before the beggar got a chance at him."

"Aha!" was the eager and satisfied response. Then his face fell. "Hum—a check! why didn't you cash it immediately?"

"Cash it! Didn't you give me Hail Columbia for cashing the last one without first consulting you?" Bill retorted; then asked: "But what's the hurry?—the

old codger's check would be good for five times the amount."

"True; but—don't you see?—if this Wallingford has peached on you since, it will be very easy for him to stop the payment of the check," said his companion, with a frown.

"Blast it! Gould, I hadn't thought of that!" Bill cried, with a startled look. "But come, we'll go this minute and get it cashed," he eagerly concluded.

The sooner the better; but you ought to have consulted me and got the money on it immediately. 'A bird in the hand'—you know."

The two men at once repaired to the bank, where Bill presented the check which Mr. Langmaid had given him for twenty shares in the "Eureka Air-pump Co."

The teller carefully examined the check, then took it to the cashier with whom he conversed in a low tone for several moments.

Presently he returned to Bill, who, with his companion, had been watching these proceedings with an increasing sense of uneasiness.

"Where did you receive this check?" the teller inquired.

"The day before yesterday, as the date must tell you. Where are your eyes?" Bill rudely responded.

"Pardon me," said the teller, with an air of politeness, in which there was a suspicion of sarcasm. "But the paper unfortunately is not dated. It was doubtless an oversight at the time; but——"

A low exclamation from Bill interrupted him.

He held out a trembling hand for the check, which the teller surrendered to him, and he saw, but too plainly, that what the teller had asserted was true.

The month had been clearly written out, but not the date, neither had the year been carried out, and he suddenly remembered that, just after Mr. Langmaid had begun to write the check for him, some one came into his office to consult him upon some business. When he was at liberty again he had simply filled in the amount, entirely overlooking the fact that he had not dated the check.

A look of blank dismay settled over the face of Bill and his companion.

"But," the teller resumed, as if he had not noticed anything peculiar in their manner, "that is of minor consequence, since Mr. Langmaid, on the afternoon of Thursday, drew all his funds from the bank; consequently we should have nothing to meet the check with, even if it had been all correct."

Bill Bunting swore a vile oath under his breath at this evidence that Mr. Langmaid had taken immediate alarm, upon learning with whom he had been negotiating for stock, and acted with the most energetic decision to secure himself against being prodigiously swindled.

"More than that," the teller continued, his eyes keenly searching the two faces before him, "he left a package here to be given to the persons who should present a check signed by him," and he passed it to Bill as he concluded.

The young man grew white with passion as he took

and opened the package, finding inclosed the certificate for the stock for which Mr. Langmaid had negotiated, together with a note addressed to himself. It read thus:

Boston, June 30th, 18—.

Mr. William Bunting: Sir—Inclosed you will find the certificate which you filled out for me this morning, and for which I have no further use. Doubtless you will understand from the name I have used in addressing you, why I have adopted the measures I have to secure myself against a probable swindle. The pump may be all that you represent—indeed I believe it to be a worthy and paying invention—but I wish to have no dealings whatever with any one who figures under an alias, nor with one whose reputation in the past has been of such a questionable nature.

William C. Langmaid.

After reading this Bill Bunting turned on his heel, and, without a word, left the bank, followed by his companion, who had also read the note over his shoulder.

“He smelled a rat and withdrew his money. That infernal meddler has given me away, as I feared,” Bill growled, with white lips and dejected mien.

“I was afraid of it,” Gould angrily retorted, with an equally crest-fallen air. “You should have known better than to have delayed the presentation of the check. We have lost a pretty sum by your confounded procrastination.”

“You can just let up on that kind of talk,” Bill retorted, with a dangerous flash in his eyes. “I’m not going to be blamed for a thing that you would have been just as likely to do yourself. But,” clinching his fist with sudden passion, “you may bet your boots I will take it out of that proud beggar for spoiling our

kettle of fish," and he concluded his sentence with a volley of oaths and curses too vile to be recorded.

"You say he has a position in the —— National Bank," Gould remarked, after a thoughtful pause.

"Yes."

"A position of trust?"

"I don't know whether he has or not, neither do I care," irritably responded Ned's implacable foe.

"Well, I mean to find out; and who knows——"

He bent forward and whispered something which appeared to electrify Bill, and put new vim and courage in him.

"That's so!" he cried a fiendish expression lighting his repulsive features. "I never thought of that! You're a rum one, Gould! Zounds! that would be better than to have forty of Langmaid's checks, like the one they've just done us out of. But it will take time."

"Of course, all such undertakings should be conducted slowly and carefully; meantime we must work the 'pump' for all it is worth. It is a good thing, in spite of Langmaid's eagerness to get clear of it; the only objectionable feature in it is the way we came by the invention. If we can only organize a stock company, and then sell out our interests to the other shareholders, it will be a good thing for us. It is barely possible that Hunting may have friends somewhere, who will be looking him up by and by; so the quicker we get the thing off our hands and skip out, making something handsome out of it, the better it will be for us."

"That is so; but how will you manage about this other plan?" Bill thoughtfully inquired.

"Well, you must work the pump business here in Boston and New York, while I throw my arts around this aspirant for bank honors."

"How long will it take, do you imagine?"

"Months—perhaps a year; I cannot tell. I suspect the fellow is one of incorruptible sort, and I shall have to accomplish by strategy what I should never gain by downright overtures," Mr. Gould reflectively observed.

"That'll be rather slow business," Bill remarked, with a frown, "and I've got to have some money—I'm dead broke," he concluded, with a covert glance into the other's face.

"But I gave you fifty only day before yesterday."

"I know it," was the half-defiant reply, "but I had to have a dress suit for that party, and the tailor wouldn't let it out without half the price paid down, and a promise of the rest within a week. Besides, my hotel bill is due."

Mr. Gould pulled out a well-filled pocket-book, which Bill eyed with a greedy glance, and taking a couple of tens from the pile of crisp bills, handed them to him.

"Now mind," he said, sharply, "you're not going to bleed me often like this; don't say money to me again for a month."

Bill seized the notes eagerly, and thrust them into his pocket, and then the two men separated, Mr. Gould going up Summer, toward Washington street, as his companion turned off into Chauncy street.

Mr. Gould walked slowly and with bent head, appar-

ently absorbed in the development of some important scheme.

"I must manage to get acquainted with this youngster," he muttered, "and try to disabuse his mind of the belief that I have anything in common with his old acquaintance, Bill Bunting. He would instantly distrust me if he suspected that we are pals. If I can manage it—it will be a rare chance, and I don't care whether he is——"

He broke off suddenly, for just then he turned the corner, and for the second time that morning, came face to face with the object of his thoughts.

Ned had been sent to a store to pay a bill, and was just coming out as Gould came along.

"I beg your pardon now," the man said, smiling, and with marked courtesy, "but I am a stranger in the city—can you direct me to Court square?"

"Certainly," Ned replied. "I have an errand myself in that vicinity and will show you the way."

"My name is Gould," the stranger explained, by way of introduction, as he turned to accompany him. "Albert Gould."

He began conversing with him in a genial, affable way, and Ned was highly entertained, in spite of the feeling of repugnance which he had at first experienced toward him upon seeing him in Bill Bunting's company.

His manner was polished, his language well chosen, and witty at times, while it was evident that he had traveled a great deal, and been a keen observer.

Before they reached Court square, Ned's dislike and suspicions had all vanished, and he began to feel quite

an interest in the "extremely entertaining gentleman."

Finally Ned paused before a building.

"This is the locality you were inquiring for—this is Court square," he remarked, actually regretting that he must part with his pleasant companion. "I have an errand here, and I must now bid you good-morning."

"Ah! so our walk is ended!" the man returned with a note of regret in his tones. "But I thank you very much, young man, for your courtesy." Then he added, with a little deprecatory smile: "I wonder if I might trespass still further upon your kindness!"

"Certainly, sir; I shall only be too glad if I can be of any service to you," Ned returned, politely.

"Well, then—they say a man is always thinking of something to eat"—this with a genial smile and a roguish twinkle in his eyes. "I do not always find it convenient to go to my hotel at noon, and eating in a noisy restaurant makes me nearly crazy. Can you direct me to some quiet place, where I can get a good lunch, and one convenient to the business centres?"

Ned laughed with amusement.

"I am the last person to direct you to a place of that kind," he said, "for I am obliged to go upon a very economical plan in providing for my inner man. But if you are not epicurean in your tastes—if you would be satisfied with plain food, well cooked, I know of a very quiet, clean place, where the prices are very moderate, too."

"I am sure that will suit me," the man responded, eagerly.

Ned gave him the street and number, which he care-

fully noted down in an elegant little Russia leather memorandum-book, with a heavy gold pencil set with a blood stone, all of which Ned's keen eyes took in at a single glance.

"I go there to get my dinner," he remarked, "and find myself very well served."

Mr. Gould's eyes flashed with a sudden gleam of triumph.

This information was just what he had been angling for, and he was well pleased to have obtained it with so little trouble.

He thanked Ned and remarked:

"I shall give the place a trial, and perhaps I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again there some day. By the way," he added, as if the thought had but just occurred to him, "won't you kindly tell me to whom I am indebted for this favor?"

"My name is Edward Heatherton?" Ned briefly responded.

"That is a good sounding name, young man; and, if I am not mistaken, you will yet do credit to it. Now good-morning, and thank you again," and the polished Mr. Gould bowed to Ned with as much courtesy as if he had been the Governor of the state, and went on his way.

"I do not believe he can be a bad sort of man, even if he was with Bill Bunting," Ned murmured, as he mounted the stairs leading to the office where he had business.

"Hum!—Heatherton! Bill said he went by the name of 'Wallingford!' " mused the stranger with a perplexed

air, as, after leaving Ned, he retraced his steps to Washington street.

CHAPTER II.

NED GOES TO ALBANY UPON AN IMPORTANT ERRAND.

Bill Bunting or William Hunting, as he now called himself, after parting from his boon companion, suddenly resolved that he would not relinquish Mr. Langmaid as one of the stockholders in the "Eureka Pump Co." without a struggle.

Accordingly, after going a block or two on Chauncy street he turned about and retraced his steps to Sumner street, and, a few minutes later, presented himself in the office of Mr. Langmaid's place of business.

An expression of unmistakable annoyance swept over that gentleman's face as he looked up and recognized his visitor; but Bill, with the coolest assurance, seated himself uninvited, opposite the merchant and inquired in a somewhat reproachful tone:

"Don't you think you have used me rather badly, Mr. Langmaid?"

"Possibly you may have experienced some annoyance over the way I adopted to protect myself against being swindled," the gentleman coldly replied.

"Swindled?" repeated Bill, in an injured tone.

"Yes, of course, I feared such a result, for after learning the truth regarding you and your history, it was but natural that I should distrust you and wish to sever all business relations with you."

"Ah! then I am right in my conjectures that Wallingford has been giving me a black eye," Bill remarked, coloring angrily.

"If you mean Ned, yes; it was he who informed me that you were sailing under an assumed name, and he also revealed the fact that it was you who once stole a dog from me, besides committing several other depredations which are on record," Mr. Langmaid candidly confessed.

"Whatever my past, as a poor, neglected boy, may have been," Bill returned, with a well-assumed air of dignified regret, "he is mistaken regarding my present character and circumstances, and yet I know he fully believes what he has told you. I should not perhaps trespass upon your valuable time, yet, in justice to myself, I feel that I must disabuse your mind of the wrong impressions you have formed. As you doubtless know, I was reared here in Boston under very adverse circumstances until I reached the age of eighteen, and, during this time, I confess I was guilty of many misdemeanors which I now deeply regret. But, I had a half-brother who was many years older than I and who started for the far West when I was a baby. There he invested in land and became a large property owner. He also invented this pump in which you have recently become interested. Four years ago he sent for me to come to him. I found him in deep sorrow, for, some time previous, he had lost his wife and two children, and he was also in very poor health. He told me he had an incurable disease—he believed he had not long to live and proposed that I should remain with him

until the end, remarking that if I conducted myself properly he would make me his heir and also leave me his invention which was being rapidly perfected. I was of course only too eager to comply with his wishes and I have made the West my home ever since, with the exception of a brief visit to Boston, which I made last year."

Bill, at this point, glanced at Mr. Langmaid to ascertain how he was receiving his story, and wondered what should cause the very peculiar smile which hovered about his lips as he spoke of his visit to Boston.

"During all this time," he resumed, "I watched with ever increasing interest my brother's work on the pump. He was very sanguine of its success and had no difficulty in getting it patented. He died only a few months ago, leaving me all that he possessed provided I would adopt his name—that of Hunting, and devote myself to the introduction of his invention to the public. He said he thought the best way to do this would be to form a stock company; accordingly I have been trying to carry out his instructions regarding the matter. Now you will see, Mr. Langmaid, that while Ned Wallingford's report of me was true in some respects, I have been sadly misrepresented regarding others. I feel very much hurt and annoyed because of your refusal to become a stockholder in this invention. I sold you the shares in good faith and think you ought to have adhered to your bargain. I feel it all the more in view of the injury which your act will do me and my interests, in the estimation of others, and I came this morning to

see if I could not persuade you to reconsider your decision."

Mr. Langmaid had listened to this very plausible story in unbroken silence.

It seemed reasonable and he felt impressed that, whatever the man's character might be, the pump was a valuable invention and would ultimately prove to be a success. But once having his suspicions of Bill's honesty aroused, he never could feel any confidence in him again and was determined to have no business dealings with him.

"Your explanations are plausible," he observed, "and everything may be just as you have stated, but I have only your word for it."

"Perhaps you would like to see my papers—my brother's deed of gift—the letters patent," Bill interposed with well-assumed eagerness.

"Those things I would not presume to question," said Mr. Langmaid. "It is your own integrity which would influence me most."

"I give you my word of honor, sir, that my life during the last four years has been above reproach. I do not recall one single act that I would wish to conceal from you," said this bold and incorrigible liar.

"That is rather remarkable," Mr. Langmaid dryly observed. "How about the insult offered a certain young lady on the Common a year ago?"

Bill felt a terrible shock go through him at this unexpected set-back, and he had to grit his teeth hard in order to keep back the volley of oaths that leaped to his tongue.

Then with well-assumed astonishment he exclaimed: "What young lady?—what do you mean, sir?"

Mr. Langmaid smiled in spite of his disgust, for he regarded the fellow's impudence and coolness as something superb.

"Have you no remembrance of the incident to which I refer?" he inquired; "have you forgotten how you were made to bite the dust for accosting a lady with insulting familiarity?"

Bill smiled as he settled himself more firmly in his chair, crossed his legs and tipped his hat jauntily to one side.

"Ha! I see," he laughed, "Wallingford has been laying it on thick and drawing upon his imagination to suit himself. It may be that the facts of the case were just the reverse of what you have stated."

Mr. Langmaid's ire kindled at this bold and slanderous insinuation.

"You impudent, lying rascal!" he exclaimed, starting indignantly to his feet, "I doubt the truth of every word you have uttered. You may have stolen your pump, for aught I know, and the story about a half-brother may be a trumped tale to fit the situation. But I happen to know the truth of that affair last summer—the young lady whom you insulted and who owed her rescue to the fine fellow whom you have so foully maligned was—my daughter."

Bill Bunting looked completely dumfounded at this astonishing revelation.

He did not dream that Gertrude Langmaid could have been connected in any way with that affair, and

the knowledge, coming as it did, rendered him speechless for the moment.

He comprehended at once, that he stood not the ghost of a chance to do any business with the indignant merchant and, with a very sheepish and crest-fallen air, he arose to take his departure.

But he would not go until he fired a parting shot.

"That proud beggar always manages to kick over my plans," he hissed, crimson with passion. "But let him look out! I have a long account to settle with him. I could stamp the life out of him, if I had him here, this minute, and I'll make you sweat, too, you stuck-up aristocrat, for the shabby trick you have played on me."

"Stop, sir!" sternly commanded Mr. Langmaid, "you may get out of this office with what speed you can, and never dare to show your face here again."

"I'll——" began the scamp defiantly, with a string of oaths.

"Go! Another word out your vile mouth and I will summon the police," Mr. Langmaid interposed, as he laid his hand upon the telephone near which he was standing.

This threat proved effectual, for the cowed schemer slunk out of the room, but muttering threats of vengeance as he went.

Mr. Langmaid was glad to be rid of him and experienced a sense of relief in the consciousness that the large sum which he had proposed to invest in the pump was still under his control.

His friend, Mr. Hilton, was not so fortunate, for he had already paid for the shares he had taken, and he

could only make the best of a bad matter, and await with patience further developments regarding his investment.

Bill disappeared from the city after that and neither Ned nor Mr. Langmaid came in contact with him for a long time.

Not so with Mr. Gould, for he suddenly presented himself one day at the table where Ned was eating his dinner in the quiet restaurant to which he had directed him.

"May I sit here with you?" the man inquired, with a luminous smile, as he laid his hand on the back of the chair beside him, "I think I should enjoy a chat with you while I have my dinner."

"Certainly," Ned told him, "he would be glad of his company;" and it often happened after that they met there, while Mr. Gould always made himself so agreeable that Ned gradually grew to regard him as a very good friend.

This went on for several months, the man warming himself more and more into the confidence and good graces of Ned, who, being honest and sincere in all things himself, naturally interpreted others at their best. Little by little, by adroit questions and insinuations, Gould managed to gain an insight into the young man's character and habits, his business relations, and hopes regarding his future prospects.

Once or twice he tried to pump him regarding his history. But this was a point upon which Ned was very sensitive and he always evaded questions of that nature. His mother's early history and troubles were

sacred to him and he would never talk about that portion of her life nor his own to any one.

One day, in January, Ned was called into the private office of the bank, and informed that an important commission was to be intrusted to him, if he was willing to assume it.

A matter of business was pending in Albany, involving the signing of important papers and the transfer of a large amount of money, which would be committed to him to bring back.

There was such a rush of business just then in the bank that no one else could very well be spared, he was told, while he had shown himself so faithful and trustworthy, they felt perfectly safe in confiding the matter to him. Would he be willing to undertake it?

Ned flushed with pleasure and a proud sense of responsibility at this mark of confidence; it was very gratifying to feel that the officials were willing to rely upon him to such an extent.

He expressed his appreciation of the honor thus shown him and said that he would do the best he could to conduct the business satisfactorily.

He paid the strictest attention to the instructions given him, and, as he was to leave on an early express the next day, the papers were carefully packed and all arrangements made for his departure that afternoon before leaving the bank.

So the following morning, having bidden Mr. Lawson and his mother good-by, Ned started forth with his neat new satchel and in the best of spirits to make his first business trip.

As he had his tickets he thought it would be more convenient to take a Tremont street car and go directly to the Columbus avenue station and catch the Albany express from that point.

Just as he stepped aboard the car he espied his friend (?) Mr. Gould standing on the corner of Winter street, evidently watching for somebody.

He gave him a smiling nod, when the man caught sight of his satchel and a queer expression swept over his face, a shrewd, alert look leaping into his eyes.

He entered the next car going the same way, keeping a sharp lookout upon the one in front until he saw Ned get off at the Columbus avenue station.

"H'm! that's queer! He's either going on a vacation or else he's bound upon business for the bank. Guess it'll be for my interest to find out what he is about," he muttered, as he too alighted and followed the young man at a safe distance.

He stood waiting at the top of the steps, leading down to the track, until the Albany express came thundering along under the bridge. Then he ran down, reaching the platform just in season to see Ned enter the second car forward.

Without a moment's hesitation he sprang aboard the last car and was soon rolling out through the suburban towns at the rate of thirty miles an hour.

At every stopping-place he was on the alert to see who got on and off the train, and at Springfield he saw Ned alight and enter the lunch-room; but noticing that he did not have his satchel with him, he inferred that

he intended to go on farther and so made no move to leave the train himself.

When they reached Albany, however, Ned, with satchel in hand and an air of business, got out and took a "bee line" for the Delavan House, Gould following just far enough behind to keep an eye on him.

He saw him enter the hotel and, feeling convinced that he intended to remain there while in the city, Gould turned in another direction and hastening to the nearest costumers's he provided himself with a disguise which so completely changed his appearance that he had not fear of being recognized by any one.

This metamorphosis accomplished, he too went boldly to the Delavan House, where he registered as "R. A. Onthank, M. D., Chicago, Ill."

This done he stationed himself in a convenient place where he could watch those who entered or left the hotel.

When Ned went out he followed him, for he felt sure from his manner that he had some important business on his hands.

Two or three times he saw him go to Hawthorn & Winthrope's, private bankers on —— street, and was convinced that his business there was of an important nature.

"I'd like to know whether he brought money with him or whether he is going to take some back," he muttered once, as he saw Ned disappear within the stately building. "If I have taken this trouble and chased him hither for nothing, I shall not feel very good natured."

He stationed himself in a doorway on the opposite side of the street to wait and watch.

Ned was absent a longer time than usual, and when he finally came out there was a graver look on his face than heretofore and an air which seemed to indicate that he felt the burden of some unaccustomed responsibility.

He stopped a moment before stepping forth upon the street and buttoned his overcoat close up to his chin, an act which caused the eyes of the watcher opposite to gleam with a greedy light, for the day was mild and such protection unnecessary.

"Aha!" he muttered, "he's got something valuable in some of his inside pockets and now my business must be to find out what it is; if it is money, he'll wish he'd never come to Albany on this errand."

Closely followed by the spy, who had so persistently dogged his steps, Ned made his way back to the Delavan House, where he went straight to the office and paid his bill.

Then going to the reading-room he drew forth a time table and sitting down began to study it attentively.

A few minutes afterward he arose and disappeared upstairs where he remained for a short time, then came down with his satchel in hand, this indicating that his business was completed and he was homeward bound.

After leaving the key of his room with the clerk, he proceeded directly to the station, where he purchased a ticket, with a seat in a parlor car, for Boston.

The next train was to leave at five o'clock and was due in Boston at eleven-five.

Gould, still clad in his impenetrable disguise, also purchased a ticket for "the Hub," and secured a chair in the parlor car directly behind the one that Ned had just taken.

Then as it lacked about fifteen minutes to five o'clock, he slipped across the street and disappeared inside a drug store.

When the express left Albany for Boston there were only five persons in the parlor car. A lady and gentleman who occupied chairs together, thus indicating that they were husband and wife, an elderly man who wore green glasses and walked with a cane, Ned, and a dark complexioned, heavily bearded man who sat directly behind him.

The afternoon had been cloudy, and soon after the train started a drizzling rain began to fall, foretelling a gloomy and disagreeable night.

At half-past six the train reached Pittsfield, where the lady and gentleman got off, thus leaving only three persons in the car.

Gould glanced uneasily at the man wearing green glasses and wondered if he was going through to Boston.

He was soon enlightened upon the point, however, for the next time the conductor made his appearance he inquired at what time they would arrive at West Brookfield.

"Five minutes past nine," was the reply; whereupon the gentleman settled himself comfortably in his chair

preparatory to snatching another nap, before he reached his destination.

Ned had produced a book from his satchel soon after the train started, and appeared to become immediately absorbed in its contents, to the exclusion of everything else.

The man behind him wondered what he had found so interesting as to hold his attention hour after hour, and, leaning forward he read from the top of one page, "College Latin Course in English," and from the other "Satires of Juvenal."

"Humph!" he muttered under his breath, "so our embryo banker has a literary turn of mind! but surely he will not be able to keep awake until eleven o'clock over that dry stuff!"

CHAPTER III.

NED FINDS HIMSELF IN A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT.

After ascertaining the nature of Ned's reading, Gould settled himself for a nap, thinking he might put in an hour or two of sleep as well as not.

He soon fell into a doze, but did not sleep so soundly as to be unconscious when the train stopped at Westfield, Springfield and Palmer. At each of these places he aroused sufficiently to assure himself that his intended victim had not moved from his seat and was still poring with undiminished zeal over the "Satires of Juvenal."

When the stop was made at West Brookfield the

man in green glasses limped out, thus leaving Ned and his relentless pursuer alone in the car.

After the stop at Palmer, Gould aroused himself and turned his keen eyes with an anxious, covetous look upon the young man in front of him.

After leaving Worcester, Ned put up his book and shook himself restlessly, for a feeling of drowsiness was stealing over him.

He did not mean to go to sleep—he did not intend to close his eyes even, until that precious package, which was in the inner pocket of his vest, was securely locked within Mr. Lawson's safe.

But he was very tired, for the excitement of travel and seeing new sights, together with the heavy responsibility resting upon him, had taxed his nerves severely and he would not have experienced half the sense of weariness if he had remained at home and pursued his ordinary duties.

His eyes began to grow heavy and in spite of all his efforts to overcome it, an intensely sleepy sensation was creeping over him.

He arose and walked the length of the car several times, he even went out upon the platform for a few minutes to get a whiff of fresh air, but the moment he resumed his seat his lids began to droop again, and it seemed as if he must resign himself to the thrall of the drowsy god.

He stood up again yawning, while he shook and stretched himself, glancing as he did so at his neighbor.

The man was peeling an orange and two more lus-

cious-looking ones lay just temptingly visible in a paper bag on his knees.

He looked up with a smile as Ned gaped.

"Getting sleepy, eh?" he inquired in an off-hand manner, as he separated a section from the golden fruit in his hand and slipped it into his mouth.

"Yes, I am not accustomed to traveling, and it makes me stupid," Ned replied.

"Have an orange; perhaps the eating of it will serve to arouse you," his companion remarked, as he passed the bag to him, and took another bite of his own.

"Thank you, I believe I will, since you are so good as to offer it," Ned said, as he helped himself to the smaller of the two.

He peeled and ate it, chatting sociably meanwhile with the stranger; but thinking that there was rather a peculiar flavor to the fruit, in spite of its tempting appearance, yet it was cool and juicy and refreshing.

His companion finished the one he was eating, then taking up the other eyed it rather wistfully.

"It's the last one," he said, "I guess I'd better get it out of the way. Go halves with me, will you? I don't feel quite equal to the whole of it."

"No, thank you; I've had sufficient," Ned replied, wishing now that he had not eaten the other, for it had left a disagreeable taste in his mouth.

"Then I guess I'll take it home to the baby," the man remarked, as he rolled it up and slipped it into his pocket, "and now I believe I'll go and have a comfortable smoke; there'll be just about time before we get in town."

He rose as he spoke, as if to go into the smoker, and Ned left alone, resumed his chair, and drew forth his book again.

But Gould did not go into the smoker; he stood on the platform outside the door of the car he had just left, and watched his prey with a hungry eye.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed and gradually Ned's book dropped until it rested upon his knees, while his head fell against the back of his chair, his eyes closed, his face settled into repose, and in five minutes more he was locked in a slumber so profound that little short of a smash-up would have awakened him.

When the train stopped at Framingham—the last halting-place before reaching Boston—Gould stole back into the car, and seated himself in the chair in front of Ned.

There were only twenty-eight minutes before the train would roll into the station in Boston, and what the man had to do must be done quickly.

He was obliged to wait until the conductor made his trip through the car, and then he swung his chair around until he was face to face with his victim.

Leaning forward, his skilful hands and cunning fingers make rapid work in going through the young man's pockets.

But he found not much of value until he came to the inside pocket of his vest, when he discovered a bulky wallet which he felt sure, contained valuable papers if not a large amount of money.

He deftly drew it forth and opened it, when his eyes flashed with exultation, for within there were several

packages of crisp bank notes, of large denominations, and a number of government bonds.

Quickly abstracting both money and bonds from the receptacle he slipped them within his breast, after which he carefully folded a newspaper as nearly as possible to the same size and bulk as the notes and other documents, and placing this within the wallet, which he fastened together as before with the rubber strap, he returned it to Ned's pocket, carefully rearranging his clothing as he had found it.

This had been so quickly and deftly accomplished, while the potent drug, which had been so cunningly inserted in the fruit, had done its work so thoroughly that the young man had not stirred throughout the operation.

The robber then replaced the book upon Ned's knees, swung the chair around to its original position, after which he went back to the one he had occupied when he left Albany.

He became very nervous and restless after that, kept looking anxiously from the window to read the names of the stations as the train whizzed by them; drummed upon the sill, while one foot kept up a continual and impatient tap, tap upon the floor.

He looked at his watch.

It lacked three minutes of eleven o'clock.

He uttered a sigh of relief—only five minutes more and he would be safe.

Still he kept glancing anxiously at that sleeping figure in front of him—while holding the watch in his

hand, he impatiently counted the seconds as the tiny hand ticked them off.

Eleven!

Only two minutes more!

One minute past, and the train began to slow up, as it neared the Huntington Avenue Station, where it must stop before crossing the Old Colony tracks.

Gould arose and moved toward the door. The porter was just entering.

He glanced back at Ned—he had not moved; he seemed in profound slumber.

The porter approached him as if to awaken him.

The train stopped. Gould leaped to the ground and fled away in the darkness toward the steps leading up to Dartmouth street.

No one else had got off the train at that point, and the night being so unpleasant, the place was entirely deserted.

Throwing a keen, searching glance about him, to make sure there was no one near, the man, instead of mounting these steps, slipped around behind them, and in less than five minutes, emerged again entirely changed in appearance.

A heavy wig and full dark beard with eyebrows to match, had disappeared. The slouch gray hat had been replaced by a more shapely black one. A gray and black checked muffler had been removed, revealing an immaculate shirt-front and collar with a stylish satin tie. In a word the man, instead of looking like some ordinary countryman, now appeared the thoroughbred city gentleman.

Running lightly up the steps he turned to the left on Dartmouth street, and walking rapidly across the bridge, soon vanished out of sight, and as far as his recent traveling companions were concerned, apparently out of existence.

Poor Ned, however, was left in a sorry plight.

The porter who had entered the car just as Gould was leaving it, thought it was time for him to be stirring himself and therefore attempted to arouse him.

But he did not wake easily.

The man shook him roughly and shouted in his ear that they were in Boston and he must get out, but he only rolled from side to side in his chair, with half-open eyes, looking like a drunken person in a heavy stupor.

"What in thunder ails you?" growled the porter impatiently. "Can't you wake up?"

Ned was deaf, however, to all sounds. He would partially arouse, but the moment the porter relaxed his efforts, he immediately relapsed into his stupid state again.

"There's something wrong about this," the man muttered, and then went in search of the conductor.

"He's either been drinking heavily or else he has been drugged," was that official's verdict regarding Ned's condition. "Where's the other passenger?"

"Got out at the avenue."

"Humph! I don't like the looks of it; but let him alone till we are at leisure then we'll give him a cup of strong coffee, and see what that'll do for him."

Accordingly, as soon as they were at liberty the cof-

fee was procured, and the liquid forced between Ned's lips, until he had swallowed the most of it.

It had the desired effect after a time and sitting up he looked around with a dazed expression.

"What is the matter with me?" he asked as he noticed the cup in the porter's hand.

"That is more than I can tell. It looks to me as if you had crooked your elbows a little too often," said the conductor, with a good-natured laugh.

Ned flushed.

"I never drink anything of an intoxicating nature," he said, with quiet dignity.

"Well, then, you have been broken of your rest a good deal lately, for you were more difficult to wake than the seven sleepers I've heard about."

An expression of alarm swept over Ned's face at this. He had fallen asleep while on duty in spite of his determination not to do so.

He put his hand to that inside pocket with a sudden heart-sinking.

Had his precious trust been stolen while he slept?

No, the wallet was there, safe enough, and apparently untouched. Reassured he arose to leave the car, after paying the porter for the coffee, and thanking both him and the conductor for their efforts in his behalf.

His head felt heavy, and there was a strange feeling of numbness throughout his body—his legs especially seemed to be very clumsy and as if they hardly belonged to his body.

"I must have slept soundly, indeed," he thought, as

he walked down the platform, but having no suspicion of the truth. The only explanation that he could think of was that there had been such an unusual tension on his nerves, he had become exhausted by it.

He took a carriage, and reached home a little before midnight.

He found Mr. Lawson and his mother both up, watching for him, and after exchanging greetings with them, and giving them a brief outline of his trip, he asked Mr. Lawson to lock the wallet in his safe. He was still so unsuspecting that it did not occur to him to examine it, for it had no appearance of having been tampered with. Then they all retired without a thought of the terrible revelation which the morrow was to bring to them.

Ned's condition was almost as bad, when he awoke the next morning, as when he was so roughly aroused in the car the night previous. His head ached, and there was a very disagreeable taste in his mouth; in fact he was almost sick, and could not eat a mouthful of breakfast.

His mother insisted that he was not able to go to the bank but he said he must, and after drinking a cup of strong coffee, he obtained the precious wallet from the safe, and started forth to meet his fate.

Even then it did not occur to him to examine the wallet. The cashier of the bank in Albany had himself placed the notes and bonds in it, and secured it with a strong rubber band, and he wished to deliver it to his employers just as he had received it.

He entered the bank a little after nine o'clock, and

going directly to the private office of the cashier, handed the wallet to him.

"Well, Heatherton, I hope you had a pleasant trip," the man remarked, as he cordially shook hands with him.

"Very, thank you, sir; although I have felt the burden of responsibility rather more than was comfortable," Ned smilingly responded.

"I believe it has worn upon you," the man returned, as he noticed his pale face and heavy eyes. "Are you ill?"

"No, except that I have a slight headache. I hope you will find everything all right there," Ned remarked, as the cashier removed the strap from the wallet.

"So you felt the responsibility rather burdensome, eh?" he remarked, with a little laugh, as he laid the wallet open on the desk before him. "Well, that isn't to be wondered at since it 'was your first experience. You'll get over that, however, after a while. Hullo! what does this mean."

The exclamation had been caused by the discovery of the folded newspaper which had been placed in the wallet when the bank notes and bonds were abstracted.

Ned started as the man began to unfold it.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "there was no newspaper in the wallet when Mr. Cutler gave it to me yesterday."

Then leaning forward to look more closely into it, he cried aghast:

"But the money! where are the bills? Where are the bonds? Great heavens!"

"Heatherton, what does this mean?" sternly de-

manded the cashier, who at once realized that there was grave trouble ahead, and whose face was scarcely less pale than Ned's, which was absolutely ghastly.

"I don't know—upon my honor, I don't; everything was alright yesterday when I left Albany. Oh, where is the money? What can have become of it?" Ned exclaimed wildly, as he seized the wallet in his trembling hands and searched every pocket for the missing notes and papers, forgetting in his excitement that the bulky package must have been the first thing to attract attention.

Then the dreadful truth forced itself upon him—the money had been stolen—he had been robbed while he had slept, like a careless soldier at his post! The bonds were gone, and he was responsible for the loss.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR YOUNG HERO IS STILL IN DEEP WATERS.

The cashier regarded Ned with a puzzled expression, for the young man looked perfectly wild as the conviction of the terrible situation forced itself upon him. His face could not have been whiter if he had been dead, and he trembled so violently that he was obliged to lean against the desk for support.

"Well," said the cashier, when he could recover his own self-possession sufficiently to speak. "I, of course, cannot answer your questions satisfactorily—you are the proper person to explain this mystery. Where is the money? What can have become of the bonds?"

"I don't know," groaned Ned, with pallid and quivering lips, as he sank strengthless upon a chair.

"You don't know!" thundered the cashier, sternly. "But you had them—you received them yesterday?"

"Yes. I went to the bank a little before four o'clock yesterday afternoon; I waited until it was nearly time to close the bank, so as not to have the money about me longer than was necessary. The cashier, Mr. Cutler, arranged it and the bonds in different packages, placing them in the wallet and securing that with this rubber strap. I put it, in his presence, in the inside pocket of my vest and did not once remove it until I reached home last night, when I gave it to Mr. Lawson to put in his safe," Ned explained, with what coherency he could.

"Did you examine it last night after reaching home, to ascertain if the contents were all right?" the cashier inquired.

"No, I did not open the wallet; I have not once removed the strap. I was so sure that it was exactly as Mr. Cutler gave it to me that I did not think it necessary."

"Edward Heatherton, are you telling me the truth?" demanded his companion, looking him sternly in the eye with a glance that must have made any novice in guilt quail before him.

"The solemn truth, sir," Ned returned, meeting his gaze unwaveringly, while an expression of agony swept over his features; "but, oh! Mr. Cranston, I am crushed, and I cannot understand it. Yet stay!" he cried, starting wildly up, as his thoughts went flashing back over

the events of the previous night. "I see it all now—I have been robbed—I have been robbed!"

"There can be no doubt about that," his companion curtly remarked, "but can you trace the act to any one in particular?"

"I think so—I believe so," Ned said, eagerly.

Then he related all that had occurred during his homeward journey; how he had taken his book along to study, so as to make sure that he would not sleep; how he had grown drowsy in spite of every effort against the feeling, and while pacing back and forth to overcome it, the man occupying the chair behind him, had offered him the orange.

"Describe him," briefly commanded the cashier.

Ned did so, and the man's lips were gradually compressed into a hard, stern line as he realized but too plainly that the traveler had been disguised.

"Drugged!" he muttered, as Ned spoke of the queer taste he had noticed while eating the orange, and the subsequent events in the car.

"Can it be possible?" the young man exclaimed, looking perfectly blank as he caught the ominous word. "I never thought of such a thing!"

"I should suppose you would have suspected that something was wrong, when you came to yourself and felt so queerly," Mr. Cranston remarked.

"I did for a moment wonder if I had been robbed," Ned replied, "and I instantly felt inside my vest, but when I found the wallet just where I had put it, and apparently untouched, I did not dream that it had been tampered with. I naturally thought, if any one was

going to rob me, he would have taken wallet and all."

"True—that would be the probable conclusion," said the cashier, while he studied the young man's face with a keen, intense gaze.

Ned appeared to be perfectly honest in his explanations, and his story certainly sounded plausible, while his grief and consternation over his loss were too genuine to be doubted.

He had appeared to be the very soul of honor, during his connection with the bank, while no one could have been more faithful in the performance of his duties, and all this, of course, told in his favor.

At the same time Mr. Cranston knew that even the most tried and true were liable to fall, in times of peculiar temptations, and it might be that they had made a mistake in intrusting one so young and untried with so important an errand.

"Oh! just to think," Ned cried, hoarsely, as he nervously paced back and forth through the office, "that this was my first commission—that, when I was so anxious to execute it creditably to myself and satisfactorily to you, I should have failed so miserably. And, more than that," he went on, with increasing anguish of mind, "I cannot restore the money—I cannot replace or redeem those bonds. Oh! tell me, Mr. Cranston, what shall I do? I believe it will drive me insane."

"Sit down," gravely commanded his companion, and Ned sank down into his chair and bowed his face upon his hands, too wretched almost to care to live.

Mr. Cranston left the room, carefully shutting the

door, and leaving the unhappy fellow alone in his misery.

He consulted for a few moments with one of the other officials of the bank, explaining as briefly as possible what had occurred and then a messenger was secretly dispatched for a detective.

The man was not long in putting in an appearance, when he was taken into the private office and the situation made known to him.

He then questioned and cross-questioned Ned in the most relentless manner, never once taking his eyes from his face while doing so; but it was impossible to ascertain from his own manner what his impressions were regarding the young man's sincerity and honor.

"Very bold—very cunning—very blind," he muttered, when he had gone over the whole ground for the third time, without making Ned contradict his statements in a single instance. "Now tell me how many people knew that you were going to leave the city upon business for the bank."

"My mother, Mr. Lawson, and Mr. Cranston," Ned answered.

"And you mentioned the fact to no one else?"

"Not a soul."

"Who had the keys to Mr. Lawson's safe during last night?"

"Mr. Lawson himself; but he is truth and honesty personified," Ned eagerly asserted, but flushing as the thought flashed through his mind that his good friend might be suspected of having tampered with the contents of the wallet.

"Ahem!" said the detective, dryly, "that may be, but I guess we'd better have that gentleman down here for a while."

"I will vouch for Mr. Lawson's integrity," Mr. Cranston remarked, "and, besides, he is a heavy stockholder in the bank."

"All the more reason, then, why we should send for him," laconically rejoined the detective, and a messenger was accordingly sent to summon him.

It was some little time before he arrived; meanwhile Mr. Cranston and the officer talked the matter over in a low tone, while Ned, too benumbed to think of anything but his own wretchedness, sat with bowed head and dejected mien, paying no heed to what they said.

When at last Mr. Lawson arrived, and the mysterious affair was made known to him, he was rendered speechless with astonishment and horror, and for a few moments he could only look from one to another in blank dismay.

"The boy is all right," he remarked, with considerable energy, when he at length found his voice, and comprehended that Ned was regarded with suspicion; "he's as innocent of any wrong in the matter as either you or I."

"Ahem!—well, that, of course, remains to be proved," the detective coolly returned.

"Heavens!" cried Ned, starting wildly to his feet, his face almost convulsed with pain. "I hope you do not think that I would steal that money!—I did not dream you could think that! I may have been careless. I may have been unwise in having had anything to say

to that stranger, and in accepting and eating the fruit he offered me; but to be suspected of being dishonest! I shall be wretched, indeed, if I am accused of complicity in this affair!"

There was surely no evidence of guilt in his manner, and no one but the most consummate actor could have feigned such anguish of mind, such horror at being thought capable of committing such a crime, and those observing him—even the detective—could not help feeling that he was as innocent of guilt as themselves.

Still it was a very serious affair, and they all knew that Ned must remain under something of a cloud until some solution of the mystery was arrived at.

There actually were tears in Mr. Lawson's eyes as he listened to Ned's agonized protest against being thought criminally concerned in the recent robbery.

"Of course you're not suspected of anything of the kind," he said, in a reassuring tone. "Anybody who has served his employers as faithfully as you have done, for more than a year, isn't going to have his good record entirely blotted out by a single misfortune. Now look here, Mr. Cranston—and you, too, Mr. Detective; I want this matter kept quiet—and, take my word for it, it will be the quickest and best way to get to the bottom of it. I'll advance the money that was stolen—dollar for dollar——"

"Oh! Mr. Lawson, you believe in me if no one else does!" Ned interposed, in a voice quivering with grateful feeling.

"Believe in you, lad? I'd stake all I'm worth on your honor," responded the old man, heartily. "I haven't

lived with you all these years for nothing. I've tested you in every conceivable way, and I would advance twice the amount rather than have this matter made public. As for the bonds, they can't be disposed of without nailing the guilty party, since you say they were not negotiable—at least for the present, and we shan't hurt anybody by hushing the affair for a while. Meantime, Mr. Detective, you shall do your best to hunt down the thief, whoever he may be, and you shall be handsomely paid for your time and work."

It was finally agreed to submit Mr. Lawson's proposition to the president and trustees of the bank, and if they offered no objection, the matter should rest thus.

When this was done, Ned was subjected to another trying cross-examination, but he conducted himself with so much modest frankness and sincerity that the general belief prevailed that he was innocent of wrongdoing—that he was only the victim of a crime.

It was a trying ordeal, however, for the sensitively organized fellow, and when he was finally released from the examination he left the room greatly depressed and fully expecting that whatever the verdict might be, he would be discharged from the bank.

Then followed a long discussion upon the case, but it was finally arranged as Mr. Lawson had proposed, provided he would hold himself responsible for all loss to the bank.

This he unhesitatingly agreed to do, and it was also arranged that Ned was to retain his position, though under secret and close surveillance, as a further test of his integrity.

He had not expected this; when he left the presence of that body of grave men he had told himself, with a heavy heart, that he was "handicapped at the very outset of his career, and that it would be very difficult for him to secure another position of so promising a nature."

After a time he was recalled to the room, and was somewhat surprised to find no one there save the cashier.

"Heatherton," he remarked, looking up with a genial smile, "if you are not too much upset by the trying events of the morning, won't you take this package of papers around to Cobbs—they were promised for to-day."

Ned regarded the man with astonishment, and the expression plainly indicated that he had expected to receive his dismissal from the bank on the spot.

Mr. Cranston smiled again.

"Your face betrays you, Ned," he said, "you imagined that you were going to get 'the grand bounce,' didn't you?"

"I surely did, sir," Ned answered, with visible emotion.

"Well, you have made a good many friends since you have been with us; and, as there is a question as to how this money disappeared, the officers of the bank are disposed to give you the benefit of the doubt, and so everything will go on as before—at least for the present," Mr. Cranston explained.

"I am sure it is very considerate," Ned began, huskily. Then, feeling that he could not trust himself

to say more, lest he should break down entirely, he took the bundle of papers and abruptly left the office.

The cashier gave two or three satisfied little nods.

"I'd as soon believed it of myself as of him," he said, in a low tone, as he turned his attention again to his books.

Ned went about his errand with a thankful though still heavy heart.

He felt that the bank officials had been very good to him, and he resolved that he would not spare himself in the future, if by any amount of faithfulness and diligence he could further their interest and thus regain his somewhat tarnished reputation.

Still his trouble and the loss to the bank weighed very heavily upon him, and he rebelled, with all the strength of his honest heart, against the stigma which he felt must rest upon him until the real thief could be brought to justice.

"But I must not let it break me down," he thought. "I must fight against it, and mother must not know one word of all this trouble, for it would worry her to death. If I carry such a haggard face, as I have during the past week she will begin to suspect that something worse than a 'disordered liver' is the matter with me. I will ask Mr. Lawson to be careful not to arouse her suspicions—dear Mr. Lawson!" he continued, swallowing hard at the lump in his throat, "how kind he was to agree to advance the money. But I shall pay it all back some day. What a good friend he has always been to both of us! I hope I may some time be able to repay him for his many favors."

Ned did not realize—though the man himself did—that Mr. Lawson had been getting his pay as he went along, for never, during his long life, had he enjoyed so pleasant a home as since Mrs. Heatherton had come to preside over it, while personally, both mother and son had won a strong hold upon the eccentric old man's affections, aside from the fact that he knew that they were closely related to him by ties of blood.

As Ned turned into Mount Vernon street on his way home that afternoon, he overtook Mr. Lawson, who greeted him with unusual gentleness.

"Hold up your head, my lad—hold up your head," he said, cheerily. "It'll never do for you to carry such a face as this home to your mother; we mustn't let her get wind of what has happened."

"Oh, Mr. Lawson, I am glad to hear you say that," Ned eagerly said, "for I was wondering if it would be wrong to keep the truth from her; you know I have never had any secrets from her."

"Of course it would not be wrong. Who wants the blessed little woman to worry herself sick, and all for nothing?" Mr. Lawson responded with assumed roughness, to hide a suspicious quiver which he felt creeping into his tones.

"But it will not be an easy thing to do, for my heart is almost broken, and it is hard to carry a smiling face when——"

"Tut! tut!" interposed his friend, as Ned's voice broke, "you just put on a bold front, for the thing is going to come out all right by and by! It was rather an unfortunate occurrence, I admit, and I'd rather have

given twice the amount than had it happen to you. But, I know that you are true blue and you're going to prove it to everybody, sooner or later. And even if you shouldn't be able to, my boy," he added, as he slipped his arm confidently within Ned's, "I've promised to pay the bank the full value of those bonds when they become due, and no one outside the bank will ever be the wiser."

"Have you bound yourself to that, Mr. Lawson?" Ned cried, astonished at this fresh evidence of the man's interest in and regard for him. "How good you are to me! I begin to feel as if next to my mother, you are the best friend I have in the world."

CHAPTER V.

A NEW ACTOR APPEARS UPON THE SCENE.

Ned found it very hard, as he had said, to assume a cheerfulness, that was so foreign to his mood, while in the presence of his mother. He made the effort, however, and though she several times spoke anxiously of his unusual pallor and heavy eyes, she was satisfied with his assurance that he was "only tired—not ill," and did not suspect the truth.

He attended regularly to his duties in the bank, but he felt all the time as if under a ban—as if he were a marked man. Consequently he carried a very heavy heart, and there were times when he felt as if he could not bear the burden of his trouble; yet he knew that

his only hope lay in the faithful performance of his work and unceasing efforts to live down the suspicions against him.

Thus several months passed during which the detective who was trying to clear the mystery, worked most diligently, but without gaining any clew to the cunning thief who had so cleverly robbed Ned.

It was very discouraging, but Mr. Lawson always spoke cheerfully when Ned referred to the subject, telling him to put it out of the mind, for his good name should be protected at any cost.

But no one can foresee future events, and neither of them could know that Ned was destined to go down very much deeper into the slough of despond.

Thus spring came around again, the trees began to leave out, the weather grew fine, and Ned found himself looking forward to Gertrude's return from school for her summer vacation; besides, the "two years" were nearly up.

One morning, as Mr. Lawson was crossing the common, he met with a startling adventure.

He was walking quite slowly, with bent head and hands clasped behind him, apparently deeply absorbed in some important subject.

He was suddenly aroused from his meditations, however, by a touch upon his arm, and, glancing up, found a well-dressed man of middle age looking him earnestly in the face.

Mr. Lawson felt a great shock go through him with the sudden suspicion which flashed through his brain.

"Well?" he questioned, with a quick, indrawn breath.

"Yes, Uncle Ben, I see that you recognize me," the man responded, with a swift, peculiar smile passing over his face.

"Richard Heatherton!" faltered the old gentleman, with pale lips. "I thought you were—dead!"

The stranger gave vent to a short, bitter laugh at this.

"And thought the world was well rid of me, no doubt," he retorted, sarcastically. "Well," he added, with a hardening of the lines about his mouth, "perhaps it would have been, if such had been the fact, but since it wasn't, I shall have to be a 'cumberer of the ground' for a while longer. I didn't expect to run across you, though, here in Boston—I scoured New York far and near for you."

"What did you want of me?" curtly inquired Mr. Lawson, who was beginning to recover himself a little.

"Why, I wanted to ascertain, of course, if you had forgiven your scape-grace of a nephew for the follies of the past."

"Hum—then you have come to your senses sufficiently to own your sins," was the evasive reply. "Where have you been all these years?"

"In that land where numberless other scoundrels seek an asylum—Australia. But you don't appear to be very glad to see me, Uncle Ben."

"No, I'm not," was the blunt and unequivocal retort.

"That is very encouraging to a returned prodigal," said Richard Heatherton, bitterly, and flushing hotly.

"'Prodigal;' yes, I guess that's about the right term to apply to yourself," Mr. Lawson grimly responded.

"But why have you allowed us to believe you were dead all these years?—what could be your object?"

The man flushed again, and seemed undecided what answer to make to this question; but after a moment he replied:

"You all renounced—discarded me, you know, and there was nothing left to me but to clear out and try to take care of number one; so I thought the farther away I went the better."

"Then it was all a lie—your dying aboard that vessel?"

"Yes. I may as well admit that it was only a story intended to cover my tracks more effectually. There was a death, however, on board the vessel in which I sailed—a man who shared my state-room, and who, having lost both wife and children, had no ties in this country, and had turned his back upon it in the hope of being able to forget, amid new scenes, the grief that was breaking his heart. He was taken suddenly ill the second day out, and, from the first, the ship's surgeon said he could not live. I resolved that I would let him be taken for me. I had broken away from every one—no one cared for me or would mourn for me—indeed, I thought it would be a relief to you all to believe me dead. This man was delirious from the first, so he was unable to contradict any statement which I might make. I assisted in the care of him—spoke to him as 'Heatherton;' the surgeon and steward appeared not to suspect anything wrong, and thus it was easy to carry out the deception. When the man died the certificate was filled out with my name, the death was

so recorded on the ship's log-books, while I was believed to be he, and addressed by the name which he had borne, consequently your worthless nephew, to all intents and purposes, passed out of existence."

"What was your object in returning to existence?" Mr. Lawson pertinently demanded, as his companion paused. "Perhaps you imagined that it was time your uncle passed in his checks, and possibly you might find a fortune awaiting your return."

Richard Heatherton flushed hotly—a deep, conscious red suffusing cheek, neck, and brow, while an angry oath leaped to his lips, although it was instantly checked.

"Truly, Uncle Ben, this is a sorry welcome with which to greet a man who has been a wanderer for more than twenty years," he remarked, in an injured tone; then added, with well-assumed regret, "I perceive that you cannot forgive the extravagance of which I was guilty in my youth."

"'Extravagance!' If that was the worst of your sins, we might perhaps talk about forgiveness," the old man retorted, a vindictive gleam in his eye, as he thought of the wrongs of the gentle woman who had so faithfully presided in his home during the last few years—as he thought of the bright, manly fellow, who had been obliged to fight his own way in the world when he should have been surrounded by the care and protection of his father.

"The worst of my sins!" repeated his nephew, "I am not conscious of having done you any other wrong

than that of leaving some rather heavy bills for you to settle, when I so unceremoniously left the country."

"Your wrong against me is the least of your guilt," was the stern rejoinder.

"You deal in enigmas. What can you mean, Uncle Ben?"

"It is useless for you to feign ignorance, for I know, though you may think I do not, how you wronged and deserted a beautiful young girl——"

"Ha!—what—how——?"

Richard Heatherton staggered as if his uncle had struck him in the face, as he uttered these surprised exclamations.

"What do I mean?—what do I know?" severely questioned his accuser. "I know enough to condemn you as a most heartless rascal—as a selfish, soulless scamp, bent only upon the gratification of his own desire—enough to brand you as worse than a Cain, the mark of whom should be stamped upon your brow, so that every good and true man and woman might know you for what you are, and despise you accordingly——"

"This is rather harsh language, isn't it, Uncle Ben?" the man interposed, a frown of anger contracting his brows. "All young men have their wild oats to sow, you know, and I have been no worse than hundreds of others."

"I have no patience with that senseless adage," cried Mr. Lawson, testily. "The Book of Wisdom, and all nature also, teaches that 'whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap.' All this talk about 'sowing wild

oats,' as if it were something to be expected and condoned in young men, exasperates me beyond endurance; especially when, on the other hand, a young woman cannot be guilty of the slightest indiscretion without being branded for all time. You have sown your 'wild oats,' Richard Heatherton—they have grown to maturity, and there will be an abundant harvest for you to reap, to your sorrow."

"I suppose you mean by that——" Heatherton began.

"I mean," interrupted his companion, "that the wrong which you did that young girl is going to rebound upon yourself."

"What do you know of Miriam Wallingford?" demanded his nephew.

"I know that no nobler woman lives than Miriam Wallingford Heatherton."

"Ha! why do you call her that?"

"Why—did you not marry her?"

"Ha! ha! Who's been trying to sell you now, old man?" cried Richard Heatherton, mockingly. "That ceremony was but a farce—one of my 'wild oats,' if you please. Where did the girl find you to appeal to you and fill your ears with such a tale as that?"

"Miriam Heatherton is too proud a woman to appeal to any one," Benjamin Lawson sternly replied. "But your 'farce,' as you call it, was no farce. That 'wild oat,' as you are pleased to term it, has brought forth better than you know, for Miriam Wallingford was made your legal wife, and has the papers to prove it."

"You lie!" cried Richard Heatherton, so fiercely and

with such a startled look that Mr. Lawson involuntarily recoiled.

"I do not lie," he quietly returned, after a moment. "The man who performed the ceremony, which you regarded as a farce, was a regularly ordained clergyman——"

"I don't believe it," Richard Heatherton burst forth, excitedly.

"Believe it or not, it is a fact. The name of the man was Harris—he had been settled over a small country church only a short time previous. Your friend, Mathews, suspected your game and balked it. He has since become a doctor of divinity, and now occupies a prominent pulpit in Chicago. He neglected to give you the certificate that night—he could never learn your address afterward, to send it to you; but he did send it, later, to the girl whom you tried to wrong, and it is now in her possession to prove that she is your legal wife——"

"Great Heaven!"

The cry was full of horror and agony.

"And Edward Wallingford Heatherton is your legitimate child!" Mr. Lawson concluded, without heeding the interruption.

"Ha! what are you telling me?" cried the man, in a tone that would have been a scream of intense excitement had not terror deprived him of his voice, while his eyes seemed almost to start from his head and a shudder shook him from head to foot. "I don't believe it; I tell you—I will not believe it!"

"Facts are facts," laconically observed Mr. Lawson.

A groan of anguish burst from the other man's lips; he appeared to be utterly unnerved by what he had heard.

"It can't be true! Heavens!—I will not have it so!" he muttered, shivering as with a sudden chill. Then he cried, fiercely: "Where is she—this woman who has lied to you so?"

"It does not matter to you where she is," Mr. Lawson replied; "she has no wish to ever look upon your face again. She bore her troubles with the spirit of a martyr, until she secured the proofs of her legal marriage, since when she has been comparatively happy in rearing her noble boy, who appears to have inherited his mother's virtues without his father's vices."

"Since you appear to know so much about them, I presume you have made them your proteges, and perhaps intend to bequeath your fortune to them," Richard Heatherton remarked, with a bitter sneer.

"It cannot concern you to know what my intentions may be regarding them."

"Oh, but it does, my dear uncle. I assure you I feel a most lively interest in the matter," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"Of one thing you may be very sure," said Mr. Lawson, sternly, "and that is, you shall never touch a penny of my fortune."

"Yet, next to my mother, I am your only heir, and—and Uncle Ben, I am really very close to the weather just now," whined the reprobate, plaintively.

"Then harvest your 'wild oats' and sell them for what you can get," was the laconic response of his disgusted relative. Then he added, as he ran his keen eye over the expensively clad figure before him: "You don't look as if you were a case to be brought before the Board of Associated Charities."

"Then you will never forgive me, Uncle Ben?"

"No. Why don't you go home to your father?"

"My father has lost every dollar of his property; he failed only a month ago."

"Well, I know it; all the more reason why you should go home to care for him and—your mother."

Mr. Lawson's lips trembled as he uttered those last words.

"I—I cannot face my—mother," the man said, in a low tone, as he shifted his glance and dropped his eyes to the ground.

"Humph!—that's the first glimpse of a heart that you've shown to-day," curtly returned his uncle. Then he asked: "Do your father and mother know that you are living?"

"No. Uncle Ben, will you lend me some money?"

"Not a dollar. I could forgive a spendthrift, perhaps, but a libertine and a despoiler of virtue—never!" was the relentless response, as Mr. Lawson walked away, without once turning a backward glance upon the man whom thus, for the second time, he utterly renounced.

Richard Heatherton stood watching him for several minutes with angry eyes and wrathful face.

"You wretched old miser!" he fiercely muttered. "I'll

find a way yet to squeeze your money-bags until they are as empty as a last-year's bird's nest. I'll not be so easily balked of that fortune. But—thunder and lightning! can what he told me be true?—can it be possible that Harris was an ordained minister, and that ceremony a legal one? I never dreamed of such a thing! I simply thought I was making a fool of the girl and could easily rid myself of her whenever I was disposed. She almost frightened me, though, that last night in New Haven, when she denounced me and prophesied so wisely that my 'sin would follow me all my life, and finally crush me to the earth.' It has!—it has at last! Ah!——”

The man sank upon a bench that stood under a tree near by, and, dropping his head upon his breast, gave himself up to the troubled thoughts which came thronging upon him.

“Then that was Miriam who fainted that afternoon at the theatre,” he finally broke out again. “I was terribly startled by what I thought merely a strange resemblance. I was almost sure, though, it was the girl herself when her eyes met mine, and she fell like a lump of lead. But who would have supposed that Ben Lawson would espouse the cause of the injured and oppressed!—that tight old money-bag! And that fine-looking fellow who was with her is—ugh!” and another icy shiver shook the man from head to foot.

Then a groan burst from him and he dropped his white, pain-convulsed face upon his hands.

“Vera! oh, Vera my darling—my poor, defrauded pet! What does this strange—this damnable story,

mean for you? Ah!" and here he started fiercely up, "but you shall never know it—I will shield you with my life, my idol! I will crush her—them; they shall be ground to powder beneath my feet before one word shall reach your ears; before even a suspicion of the truth and the shame of it shall ever enter your mind."

CHAPTER VI.

NED MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

The man sat there, under the shadow of the trees, for nearly an hour after Mr. Lawson's abrupt departure, while it was only too evident, from the impress which they left upon his downcast face, that his reflections were of a very unpleasant character.

But at last rising and bending his steps toward Bolyston street, he entered a Back Bay car, and finally alighted in front of the Hotel Vendome.

Entering the house, he proceeded, with the air of one familiar with the place, to a room on the second floor, where he rapped gently upon the door, when a musical voice bade him come in.

The moment he entered, a young girl of sixteen or seventeen sprang to meet him, and, winding a pair of white plump arms about his neck cried out:

"Oh, papa! how long you have been gone, and how glad I am to have you back; everything is so strange and lonely in this busy city. But—are you sick, or tired, or worried?" she questioned, pushing back the

heavy hair from his brow and gazing with anxious fondness into his troubled face.

"Neither, my pet," he responded, with exceeding tenderness, while a luminous smile chased the clouds from his brow, his voice assuming a cheerfulness which he was far from feeling. "What makes you imagine such a thing?"

"Because, always when you are troubled, these lines grow so much deeper," the young girl answered, as she smoothed with her rosy finger-tips the numerous wrinkles which had settled upon his forehead. Then, pulling his head down to her, she kissed them softly with her scarlet lips.

She was a vision of wondrous beauty. Slender, dainty, and graceful as a fawn in figure, she also possessed a face of surprising loveliness.

Her skin was smooth and clear, like a piece of creamy satin. There was no decided color in her cheeks, but the vivid scarlet of her lips relieved it of the appearance of pallor or unhealthfulness. Her eyes were large and soft, with the nut-brown tint and appealing expression seen in those of a gazelle. Her hair was black as night, and curled about her shapely forehead in delicate graceful rings, making her seem, at first sight, younger than she really was.

The mouth was sweet, the nose small and straight, the nostrils very delicately outlined.

It was a face upon which every eye would linger and love to gaze—a face which appealed to all the tenderest feelings of one's nature; a face to study and make one wonder where and how it got its perfect con-

tour, its lines of refinement, its lovely and ever-varying expression, which made it seem more attractive with every change. She was dressed in a richly-embroidered robe of spotless white, caught here and there with ribbons of cherry-colored satin, with ornaments of dead gold upon the faultless neck and arms; and—as the man held her in his embrace and looked upon her he seemed to realize as he had never done before her almost intoxicating beauty.

“My darling,” he cried, a quiver of passionate love and feeling in his voice, “how you love me!—how I love you! what should I do without you?”

“What should we do without each other, my Ricardo! Ha! ha!” and the clear, musical laugh echoed cheerily through the luxurious room as she snatched another kiss—“we are more like a pair of lovers than like a staid, dignified paterfamilias, and a harum-scarum daughter—eh, mon pere?” and again the rosy lips sought his in a lingering caress.

A swift look of anguish shot into Richard Heatherton’s eyes, as some harrowing thought came to him. But he smoothed the girl’s soft, fair cheek with a tender touch, and smiled fondly down upon her upturned face as he said:

“I am afraid you will change your mind when the real lover comes to woo my star from me.”

“No real lover will ever love me more tenderly than you do,” the young girl returned, in a soft, caressing tone.

“That is true,” Richard Heatherton responded, passionately, and with a nervous twitching about his lips.

"But," checking himself, "what is my pet going to do to-day?"

"You promised to take me to some of the great shops some day, papa; why not go this morning? And," with a light laugh and a roguish gleam in her liquid eyes, "I shall want a lot of money to spend."

The man smiled, but there was an uneasy glitter in his eyes as he replied:

"Well, my Vera, we will see. Get yourself ready, and I will take you wherever you wish."

The girl gave him another impulsive kiss, then darted away to prepare herself for the trip, while her father, uttering a sigh that was almost a groan, threw himself into a chair and dropped his head upon his breast.

And there he sat, without moving, in that dejected attitude, an occasional oath breaking from him, actual tears brimming his eyes, until the return of his child.

But the moment he heard her light footsteps approaching the door, he started up, wiping the drops from his lashes, and turned a beaming smile upon her, as she again entered the room.

If she had seemed surpassingly lovely before, in her spotless white, she was bewitching now in her elegant tailor-made costume of navy-blue cloth, corded with white, with tiny bands of immaculate linen encircling her creamy throat and slim wrists; a jaunty sailor hat with its simple band of blue and one white wing crowning her dusky head. The contrast of the blue and white with her creamy skin and great lustrous brown eyes was very striking.

The two started forth and were soon rolling down town in an open car, the girl deeply interested in everything about her, and asking numberless eager questions about the city, in which she appeared to be a total stranger.

The man was devoted to her—his eyes scarcely left her face, but dwelt upon her with a lingering, doting fondness which plainly betrayed how his whole heart was wrapped up in her—that she was the “apple of his eye”—the crown jewel of his life, adventurer and reprobate though he was.

They alighted at Hollander’s elegant establishment, where they spent an hour looking about and purchasing a few dainty trifles. After this they proceeded to White’s, Jordan’s, and Hoveys’, and made an interesting tour of these vast stores; then visited some of the finer jewelry shops, and everywhere Richard Heather-ton lavished money upon his darling in a way to give the lie to what he had only that morning told Benjamin Lawson—that he was “very close to the weather.”

When Miss Vera had seen all that she wished, and spent all the money she desired, they had a dainty lunch at McDonald’s, after which her father told her that he would put her upon a car and send her back to the Vendome by herself, as he had some business which must be attended to before he could return.

So he accompanied her to Tremont street where he hailed the car he wanted, helped her aboard, then with a wave of his hand and a fond smile, he bade her farewell and went his way.

But Miss Vera was an independent little lady at times

—a trifle willful and heedless, perhaps, and, as she was slowly rolling up toward Boylston street, some beautiful flowers in the window of a florist caught her admiring eyes and she instantly decided that she must have some of them.

Signaling to the conductor to stop she descended from the car without thinking to notice the direction upon it, crossed the street, and flitted into the florist's, where she purchased some lovely jacks—those great, crimson, fragrant blossoms which she so dearly loved.

Then a few doors farther on, a tempting array of sweets made her pretty mouth water, and she could not resist the temptation of a box of Huyler's choicest.

She was in a strange city, where she knew nothing of locality, but striking out thus for herself had made her bold, and instead of making inquiries for a car, as she knew she ought to do, and going directly back to the hotel, she strolled leisurely on looking curiously in at the shop windows.

Thus she came to the corner of Boylston and Tremont streets, where there is always a crush of vehicles and a perfect babel of noise and confusion.

Here the timid girl at last awoke to a realization of her imprudence in leaving the car upon which her father had put her, and it suddenly occurred to her that she did not even know which one out of the many that were passing and repassing, would take her to the Hotel Vendome.

She stood for a few moments on the corner, looking about her with frightened eyes and anxious face, and

wondering what she should do—which direction she should take.

She soon espied a car, which she imagined looked like the one she had left, on the opposite side of the street, and without fully realizing the difficulty and danger of attempting such an undertaking alone, she started to cross the crowded thoroughfare to catch it. She was about midway of the wide street, when it seemed as if teams and vehicles of all descriptions were coming from every direction and surrounding her. She became confused with the noise and tumult all about her, and, not knowing which way to turn or how to get out of the vortex into which she had so heedlessly plunged, she stood stock-still in the middle of the street and gazed helplessly about her.

The car-drivers rang a furious din on their bells to arouse her attention, teamsters and cabmen shouted at her to get out of their way; their commands mingled freely with oaths, but poor Vera seemed paralyzed with fear and stood like a beautiful statue, utterly powerless to move.

Suddenly, however, a firm yet gentle hand was laid upon her arm, and yielding to it, she felt herself drawn away from the throng and danger—away from those clanging bells, the rattle of teams, and the shouts and curses of coarse men.

She hardly realized how it was accomplished, or who had come so opportunely to her rescue, until she found herself seated upon one of the benches of the Common, and, looking up, panting but grateful, into the handsomest face that she had ever seen.

"Oh! how glad I am to get out of it!" Vera breathed, as she wiped her moist and heated face with her dainty handkerchief, "and what papa would say if he knew how careless I have been, I'm sure I cannot imagine."

The gentleman who had delivered her from her perilous situation smiled, while he regarded her with admiring eyes. She was so pretty, so naive and trustful, accepting his assistance as a matter of course, that he was charmed and delighted with her.

"Oh!" she added, with a look of sudden dismay, "I have lost my roses and my candy."

"No, they are safe," said her companion, producing them; "fortunately, I managed to rescue them just as you were about to drop them. One of the roses has a broken stem, but otherwise they are uninjured, and only the wrapper to the candy-box is soiled."

"Thank you—thank you!" exclaimed the young girl, delightedly; "how good of you!—how can I thank you for helping me out of that dreadful muddle?"

"You do not need to thank me—I am very glad to have been of assistance to you. I judge that you are a stranger in Boston."

"Yes; I have only been here a few days. Papa and I came to this country a little more than a year ago, but I never was in Boston until now. I have been in a convent in Montreal. But——" with a shy glance and modest blush—"will you please tell me your name?—I want to know who has been so kind to me."

"Certainly; my name is Edward Heatherton."

"How strange!" cried the girl, a luminous smile

breaking over her lovely face. "Do you spell it H-e-a-t-h?"

"Yes," Ned replied, wonderingly at her question, but feeling a strange interest in her.

"And mine is Vera Heath," she frankly returned. "Quite a coincidence, isn't it? But Mr. Heatherton, I am very much obliged to you. And now, if it will not trouble you too much, will you please put me on a car that will take me to the Hotel Vendome?"

"With pleasure, Miss Heath," Ned responded, thinking that next to Gertrude, she was the prettiest and most winning girl he had ever seen.

Then together they walked to the corner, where Ned hailed a car, and, after putting his fair charge aboard, lifted his hat to her, in farewell, and watched her roll away toward the Back Bay, wondering if he should ever meet the lovely fairy again.

Thus Ned Heatherton and his half-sister met on that bright June day; but no suspicion entered the mind of either that the same blood flowed in their veins, or that in the future they were to meet under even more romantic circumstances than to-day.

An unaccountable feeling of sadness and depression fell over Ned's spirits after parting from the bright young girl. It almost seemed as if a bit of sunshine had faded out of his life, and all day long his mind kept recurring to the adventure of the morning, and he found himself wishing that he could see and know more of beautiful Vera Heath.

For the first time in her life Vera held a secret from her father.

She had been as deeply impressed with Ned as he had been with her. He was so manly, so handsome, so self-reliant, and exactly her ideal of a grand heroic man.

All the way out to the Hotel Vendome her thoughts were full of him, and if the words he had spoken to her, and she, too, hoped she would meet him again. Ah, if she could have talked with him a little longer, and learned where he lived and what was his business!

But something in her girlish heart prompted her to hold her peace regarding her adventure, and the interview with the handsome young stranger, whose name was so nearly like her own, and she did not mention the subject to her father upon his return to the hotel, nor allow him to suspect that she had not come directly there upon the car on which he had put her.

CHAPTER VII.

MIRIAM HEATHERTON IS STARTLED BY AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

Meantime, Richard Heatherton, after sending his daughter back to the Vendome, as he supposed, walked briskly down the street toward the Tremont House, where he expected to meet a gentleman upon business.

As he came opposite the Park Street Church, he saw, just turning the corner, a trim, genteel figure, which made the blood surge hotly to his brow, and a low, startled imprecation to escape his lips. It was the figure

of a woman, neatly clad in a tasteful suit of dark gray material, and she walked with a quick, elastic step, and a graceful carriage, that had something strangely familiar about it.

The man stopped short, crossed the street, and followed her until she turned into Mount Vernon street, and finally entered a quiet but elegant house having a brownstone front.

When Richard Heatherton came up to it he paused before the door, and swore again as he read the name of Benjamin Lawson upon the silver plate attached to it.

"I thought so," he muttered, and then stood as if pondering some grave subject for several moments.

"It has come," he said, at last, "and I may as well have it out with her first as last."

He mounted the steps and boldly rang the bell.

The door was soon opened by a neat-looking servant girl, and he inquired if Mr. Lawson was at home.

"No," the girl answered, "but he is expected soon."

"I will wait," said Richard Heatherton, and, without stopping for an invitation to enter, he stepped quickly within the hall. The girl led him to the library, asked him to be seated, then left him, but neglected to close the door tightly as she went out.

Richard Heatherton looked eagerly about the elegant room, noticing its luxurious furnishings, its costly books and pictures, with some rare bric-a-brac, for, of late, the eccentric master of the house had indulged himself in surprising his pretty housekeeper with various articles to beautify their home.

A massive safe stood upon one side of the room, close to a handsome roll-top desk, and a scowl contracted the man's brow as his eyes fell upon this.

"I'd just like to look inside that piece of furniture," he muttered, as one of his hands involuntarily crept into a pocket and rattled something that sounded like a bunch of keys.

He arose from his chair and went to a window. It looked out upon a narrow court that ran between Mr. Lawson's house and the one next to it.

He examined the fastening, and frowned as he noticed that it was a patent, and of unusual strength and security.

There was another window behind the desk, and Richard Heatherton's eyes gleamed malignantly as he perceived it.

He glided to it, slipped his hand underneath the curtain, and turned the fastening so that the sash could easily be raised from the outside, provided no one re-locked it.

As he did this, he caught the sound of a voice in the hall, and with a sudden pallor settling over his face, he stole back to his chair and sank into it, strangely agitated.

"Nellie," called the clear, sweet tones again.

"Yes, marm."

"You may go up to the linen closet, where you will find I have laid out sheets and pillow slips, besides towels and four bedspreads, which you may pack nicely into the basket there. We go to Nantucket to-

morrow, and Mr. Lawson wishes all the baggage to be ready to-night."

It was of course Miriam Heatherton who gave this order, and it was evident, from the twitching of his lips and his quickened breathing, that her recreant husband recognized the fact.

"Aha!" he muttered, with a swift glance toward the window, the fastening to which he had just tampered with, and from that to the safe; "that plan will just suit my purpose."

Nevertheless, he was very pale, and a slight shiver ran over him as he said it.

Those quiet, lady-like tones, though they lacked the eager hopefulness of twenty years ago, were only too familiar to him, and vibrated painfully upon his memory, stirring within him a feeling of guilt and remorse, such as he had never yet experienced, for the foul wrong which he had planned against a beautiful and innocent girl.

Then he heard the servant Nellie make some reply, supplemented by a question regarding other arrangements for the morrow, after which the first voice returned:

"No, we will take only what I have mentioned, and you need make no change in Ned's bed, for he will sleep here during the week and come to us on Sundays, the same as last year. After you have packed the linen you may attend to the silver as I directed—meanwhile I am going to cover the furniture and attend to the ornaments in the drawing-room."

Then Richard Heatherton heard the girl run lightly

upstairs, humming a popular air, while a quiet and moderate step passed the library door, and a moment later he heard some one moving about in the adjoining room.

"Now is my chance," he murmured, as he arose from his chair and moved towards some draperies, where he imagined he might find access to the drawing-room.

He parted them just a little, and looked within.

He had expected to see a sad-faced, jaded woman, with the light of hope and happiness entirely obliterated from her face; for such had appeared the woman of whom he had caught but a passing glimpse as she lay in a dead faint in her son's arms in the theatre several months previous.

Yes, it was Richard Heatherton—the wretch who had sought to ruin her—whom Miriam had seen that afternoon. It had been but a glimpse on her part, but it had shocked her into unconsciousness, and, for weeks afterward, she never went outside the house without fear and trembling lest she should encounter the same apparition again.

But she never saw him, and, gradually she grew to think that she must have been mistaken.

It had only been some one who strangely resembled him, her—her husband—was dead, so of course, there was no fear that he could ever come back to disturb her life again, she told herself and this belief became a certainty to her as time passed.

But to return to Richard Heatherton, as he stood regarding the woman whom he had wronged.

Instead of the faded and heart-broken creature he

had thought to see, he now looked upon a graceful figure clad in a pretty tea gown of fawn color with an embroidered front, a dainty ruching of soft lace about her throat and wrists, a heavy cord with tassels about her waist.

She was standing before an elegant etagere covered with costly bric-a-brac, carefully wrapping the choice things in soft tissue-paper, and her attitude was replete with fire and grace.

Her hair was of the same bright, brown tint, which he had so often smoothed and praised in the old days and she wore it dressed much the same, a few soft silken tresses curling lightly upon her white forehead.

Her complexion was still fair and delicate, her eyes clear and bright, her manner animated, and as she moved her head from side to side, he caught sight of the bewitching dimples in her cheeks, which in his youth he had kissed again and again and laughing to see them deepen with the smiles his act called forth.

The man flushed and his dusky eyes lighted with something of their old-time fire and admiration, as he thus looked upon the love of his youth.

"I wonder if I could, I wonder if she would," he whispered, disconnectedly. "She's lovely as ever, and if Ben Lawson has taken them into his heart and means to make them his heirs, it might be the easiest and safest way out of all my difficulties."

Then he colored a violent crimson, and a revulsion of feeling seemed to go with a great shock through him.

"Never!" he hissed between his teeth. "Vera must never know—it would break her heart, and that I could

not bear. No it can never be unless—they would promise to keep their secret from her.”

Some movement on his part, just then, caused Miriam to turn and she saw the man standing there in the archway between the two rooms, peering at her with that concentrated gaze, and she recognized him instantly, for, forgetting his caution while watching her, he had parted the curtains sufficiently to reveal his whole face.

She did not start nor make a sound, but her eyes dilated with a frightened look, and she seemed to become suddenly frozen where she stood.

“Ha! I perceive you recognize me,” Richard Heatherton began. “It is a long time since we met, Miriam, and I suppose that you, with everybody else, have believed me to be dead. You have changed very little—far less than I; but don’t look so shocked, my girl,” he interposed, misinterpreting the look of loathing which leaped into her eyes, for one of terror, “for I have no intention of doing you any harm.”

The sound of his voice unlocked her powers of speech at last.

“Why are you here?” she panted, reaching out one white, slender hand to grasp the back of a chair for support.

“Why am I here?” repeated her companion. “In search of you, of course.”

“Who told you where I was?”

“My own eyesight—I followed you here less than a half hour ago.”

"Your object?" she demanded, with cold hauteur, and fast regaining her composure.

The man laughed, a short, uneasy laugh.

He felt a veritable coward in the accusing presence of this beautiful woman, whose purity and strength of character shone through her truthful eyes, and from every lineament of her fair face, and shamed his own gross nature.

But he tried to hide the feeling beneath a light exterior.

"Come, come, Miriam," he said, in a conciliatory tone, "don't put on those heroic airs. I own that I used you badly in those old days, but I have grown older and wiser, and I would be glad to make you some reparation——"

"Reparation!" she repeated, in a tone that stung him like the cut of a lash.

"Are you so unforgiving?" he asked, with a frown.

"There can be no forgiveness for the wrong which you contemplated doing me," she returned, coldly, but with a face so deadly pale, as she thus recalled her past sufferings, that he thought she must drop senseless at his feet.

But she straightened herself after a moment and resumed: "I used the word 'contemplated' purposely, for though you planned to wreck my life, you were foiled in the fulfillment of your intentions, even though I did not learn the truth for years afterward.

"Oh! I believed in you, Richard Heatherton," she went on, with a quiver of passion in her voice. "I loved you—I staked my all upon you, and—lost, as every one

must lose who make an idol of a human being. At least I believed for a time that I had lost; fortune's wheel was long in turning to help me up—from the depths into which I had been plunged, but the truth prevailed at last, and I discovered that, instead of being the despised outcast I had so long believed myself to be, I was a lawful wife, and my child was honorably born.

"You are skeptical—you do not believe me," Miriam interposed, as she caught sight of the sneer that curled his lips, although he, too, was now deadly pale, "but the facts cannot be contested, for I hold the proofs in my possession to-day. Ah!"—with a sharp note of agony in her voice, "do you remember that morning, Richard Heatherton, when I pleaded with you for what was more than life to me, and you struck me down with a single word that was like a poisoned dagger in my heart?—when you jeeringly told me that I was no wife—that you had simply deceived me, just for the sport—the pastime of a season? Of course you remember it—you could never have forgotten it, for even in that brief hour of your triumph you feared me—you believed that you had made a mad woman of me, and, like a coward, you fled from me, and the vengeance you were afraid that I and my father might wreak upon you. That was why you hastened from the country—not because of your debts, as was reported among your friends; you were afraid of an outraged woman," and the scorn which rang through Miriam Heatherton's clear tones made the hot color surge in a crimson sheet over her listener's face.

"But my life was ruined—my heart was broken, at

least for the time; for"—and a sob burst from her quivering lips at this point—"I never looked upon the faces of my parents again. I—their idolized and only child—had to flee from the sight of every one whom I knew to hide my shame. And they both died of grief in less than three months. Then for long years I toiled for the support of myself and my child. I would gladly have died, but I dare not take the life that was God-given, nor shirk the sad responsibility laid upon me, and doom my boy to orphanhood, and the cold charity of an indifferent world. How glad I have been since that I did not, in my despair, thus rashly sin past all forgiveness, for, at last, my reward came; and, through the kindness and conscientiousness of the Rev. Dr. Harris, of Chicago, I now hold the papers to prove that I was made a legal wife. Ah! you can never realize how I exulted over the fact—not because I was your wife—for I would have scorned to assert any claim upon you; but because every shadow of dishonor was removed from me, and my dear boy. It made a new woman of me—it gave me life—renewed my youth—put strength, and hope, and joy into my heart; and now the future looks very bright for us both."

But the man before her knew that no thought in connection with him served to brighten that future; he realized, but too plainly, that every spark of the affection which she might have once experienced for him, had burned to ashes in her heart.

This was very patent to him even before she drew her slight, graceful figure to its full height, and resumed:

"But for you, Richard Heatherton"—and, lifting one taper, rose-tipped finger, she pointed toward the door—"you can go out of here as stealthily as you came in, for you have no part nor lot in my life, even though, in the sight of the law you may be my legal husband. I glory in the fact only because of my triumph over you and the wrong you would have done me, and because it gives an honorable name to my son; but you are no more to me than the stones of yonder pavement, which every day I tread beneath my feet."

"Miriam——"

"Never dare to address me like that," she burst forth, before he could utter another word, while a vivid scarlet flushed her face, "I am to you as a stranger—I will not recognize you as anything else; I will have nothing to do with you."

Richard Heatherton thought he had never seen her so beautiful as she was at that moment—not even in her youthful days, while as he gazed about the beautiful room, which everywhere showed traces of her care and taste, and realized the charm of her presence, a regret for what might have been, if he had done what was right and honorable, smote him painfully—a sense of remorse for the wrong he had done her, and the son of whom any father might be proud, and, more than all else, for the irreparable injury which must in consequence fall upon the darling of his heart—his bright, beautiful, idolized Vera.

Ah! this was the keenest sting of all—that his sin against one who had been scarcely less beautiful, who had been equally pure and innocent, must blight, for all

time, the life of his lovely child; for—the thought seared both heart and brain—if his marriage with Miriam Wallingford had been legal, the tie which had bound him to that other woman had not been lawful, and—Vera was illegitimate.

Surely, what his uncle had only that morning said to him was being verified in the most unexpected and crushing manner—he was indeed “reaping an abundant harvest” for the “wild oats” he had so boasted of having sown in his youth, and the relentless scythe had fallen where he had never thought it possible—it had ruthlessly cut down and laid low his dearest, his most cherished hopes.

These thoughts drove him to the verge of despair.

Oh! it did not seem possible that in one moment of time the world and life could be so bereft of light and hope.

Ah! could Miriam have suffered as he now suffered, when he smote her down with that one word to which she had referred a little while ago, when he had twitted her in his anger with the stigma which would rest upon her child when she should give it birth.

Those were “wild oats,” indeed, which he must now gather into his own garner; the opprobrious epithets he had thrown at Miriam, years ago, instead of branding his intended victim with shame, had rebounded to dishonor her who was dearer to him than his own life.

A tempest of wrath, and grief, and shame, raged within him, as these thoughts surged through his brain.

But Vera should never know—no such grief must

ever dim the light of her beautiful eyes, or mar the brightness of her happy face.

But it galled him terribly to think of Miriam Wallingford and her boy, here in Benjamin Lawson's home, triumphing over him, and perhaps wheedling the old man out of the fortune which he had so confidently expected would come into his possession, by inheritance, and thus descend eventually to Vera.

He resolved that they should never succeed, if such was their aim; he would overthrow them by some means; he would trample them in the dust before they should usurp his rights; he would gain his ends by strategy if he could—by violence, if he must.

"How came you here in Boston, and in Benjamin Lawson's household?" he demanded, when he could command himself sufficiently to speak, and ignoring Miriam's last bitter words.

"That is a question which does not concern you," she coldly replied.

"Perhaps it does concern me more than you realize," he returned, hotly. "I suppose you know who—what he is."

"Yes; I know that he is an honorable gentleman," Miriam responded, with significant emphasis.

Her companion winced visibly, and flushed.

"I mean what his relationship is to me," he said.

"His relationship to you!" repeated Miriam, with a scornful inflection, yet with a slight start of surprise; "I do not believe one drop of his blood flows in your veins."

Richard Heatherton looked astonished at this reply, for he could not doubt its sincerity.

"Is it possible that you do not know?" he exclaimed.

"Know what?" she inquired, breathlessly.

"That he is my uncle—my mother's only brother?—do you pretend you never suspected this, and have not wormed yourself into his confidence and good graces, in the hope of securing the fortune which should come to me, for your son?" her companion demanded, with a skeptical sneer upon his handsome but evil face.

CHAPTER VIII.

RICHARD FINDS THE TABLES TURNED.

Miriam Heatherton looked amazed at her companions communication.

"Benjamin Lawson your uncle—your mother's brother!" she exclaimed, ignoring his contemptible insinuations regarding her motives. "No; I do not—I cannot believe it."

"It is the truth; my mother's name, before her marriage, was Rachel Lawson," the man asserted, so positively that she could no longer doubt the truthfulness of his statement.

Then it dawned upon her why Mr. Lawson had always been so kind to her and Ned; why he had, from the very first of their acquaintance with him, shown so much tender interest in them.

He had doubtless suspected, at the outset, that they

were the wife and child of his nephew, whom he believed to be dead, and this, of course, had been proven to him when she had confessed who she was, and related her history to him.

But she thought it very strange that he had never told her of the fact, and acknowledged the relationship.

Why had he concealed the truth from her all these years? Did he fear that she and Ned would take advantage of the fact to worm his fortune from him, as had just been suggested?

The rich color mounted to the sensitive woman's brow, at the bare thought of his suspecting her of anything so ignoble.

"Yes, it is a fact," Richard Heatherton continued, "and, in spite of your pretensions to the contrary, I believe you have known it all along, and have been playing your cards for his money."

"I have not," Miriam indignantly returned. "I never dreamed of such a thing; you are only judging me after your own ignoble standard."

"But I am his legal heir," the man went on—"his only heir, next to my mother, and, eventually I shall inherit all that he has. Now, Miriam," he continued, in a conciliatory tone, "be reasonable and sensible—don't set yourself up against me as a foe, and try to ruin my prospects with my uncle. Let bygones be bygones. I know that I used you meanly years ago; but if, as you say, that marriage was legal, why, we must try to come to some amicable terms, and I will agree to make a comfortable provision for you and—the boy, for the future;

that is, if you will agree not to interfere with my expectations."

But Miriam had grown cold and haughty during his speech. Her lovely eyes, however, glowed like coals of fire; her lips curled with contempt for the wretched specimen of a man before her.

"'Be sensible!'" she repeated. "I ought to have expected such an admonition from you, perhaps, since I so idiotically allowed myself, years ago, to be persuaded by you into a secret engagement and clandestine marriage. Oh! if young girls could only realize the doom that is sure to follow such a reckless act how much suffering and remorse they might be spared! But I came to myself—my eyes were opened by your heartlessness on that day when you revealed your baseness—your true character to me, and every atom of my love for you was burned out of my heart. 'Let bygones be bygones?' Yes, that is just what I wish to do—what I have done. All sentiment regarding you has been so thoroughly eradicated from my nature that you are to me as if you never had existed. I ignore, I repudiate you utterly; I would never have even acknowledged the legality of our marriage, much less attempted to prove it, but that my boy might be able to claim that he was of honorable birth."

It was not pleasant to her companion to be obliged to stand there and listen to such scathing words, and they cut him like a two-edged sword.

No man can patiently endure the disdain and repudiation of the woman over whom he has once held unbounded sway, and Richard Heatherton's arrogant

nature was galled by the stinging words of his injured wife.

"No, Richard Heatherton, you are nothing to me," she resumed, after a moment, "you never can be anything to me. I have so risen above you and the wrongs you have done me, that I am not even moved to hate you, as some women would do. You can judge, perhaps, how utterly indifferent I am to you when I tell you that I am living happily in the present; I enjoy life—everyday is full of sunshine and content in the performance of my duties and in looking forward to a promising future for my dear boy. Never come near me again, Richard Heatherton—never speak to me, never remind me of the past. If, as you say, you are Mr. Lawson's nephew, and you must come here to visit him, I suppose I shall be obliged to meet you as I would meet any other stranger who might be a relative of his. If you are his legal heir, and expect to inherit his fortune, that is nothing to me—I have never had a thought of receiving anything more from him than the amount which he pays me monthly, for caring for his home, and in return for which I try to make it as pleasant as possible for him. Your insinuation that I have been playing my cards for his fortune is too contemptible to be refuted. Now go; I never wish to see your face again."

"Then I understand that you have no desire to acknowledge the tie that exists between us," the disconcerted man remarked, while he wondered at, and was unaccountably irritated by her utter indifference toward him.

"Oh, yes," the fair woman calmly replied, "I acknowledge that I was made you legal wife some twenty years ago—that is a fact which I am very particular about having established; but, as for ever recognizing you as my husband—no; a thousand times no!"

"How about a divorce, then?" he ventured to suggest.

Miriam's crimson lips curled with irrepressible scorn.

"I could never be more completely divorced from you than I am at this moment," she icily returned.

The man flushed. She was very lovely, standing there, so cool and self-possessed; so satisfied with her present independent position; so supremely indifferent to his existence, and their relations in the past, and his old passion for her was suddenly renewed. But for Vera and his desire to shield her from the knowledge that he had had another wife living at the time of his marriage to her mother, he felt that he would leave no stone unturned to win back the sweet confidence and affection of this fair woman, whom he had so ruthlessly discarded, and whom any man might have been proud to acknowledge as his wife.

But, since there could be no hope of this, he resolved to manage some way to secure himself and prevent her from ever making him any trouble regarding his uncle's property, if the old man should happen to die without making a will.

"Then, perhaps, you will sign a paper releasing me from all future responsibility or obligation toward you," he said, though a sense of the shamelessness of such a request dyed his face crimson for the moment.

"All future responsibility or obligation!" Miriam repeated with flashing eyes, "judging from the burden you have borne in the past, in those respects, such a document would, no doubt, be very valuable to you," she concluded, with scathing sarcasm.

The man had never been so conscious of his own meanness and littleness as at that moment, and he winced visibly under her satire.

"I suppose, however," she added, "I am to understand by that, that you wish me to sign away my right of dower as a wife?"

"Yes," he answered, with averted face—he could not meet the fine scorn which he knew was gleaming in her blue orbs.

"I shall never do that, Richard Heatherton," she returned, with emphatic decision; "and even if I should, that would not secure you against the claims of your son."

He knew it but too well, and it made him realize Vera's terrible situation with a feeling of despair such as he had not experienced.

This was followed by a blaze of anger and defiance, accompanied by a desire for revenge upon Miriam because of the victory she had achieved over him.

"You shall regret this!" he cried, vindictively.

"Regrets in connection with you have long since ceased," she composedly returned.

"Do not be too sure," he retorted; "there are more ways than one of wounding you and making you feel my power. Look out for yourself, Miriam Walling-

ford, and look out for the boy of whom you are so boastful."

With this vindictive warning the man turned abruptly and left the room and the house, while Miriam sank upon a chair with both hands pressed over her startled heart, a terrible fear suddenly depriving her of all strength.

Ah, yes, she thought, he might make her feel his cruel power through Ned!—he could indeed crush her to the earth if he should dare to injure her boy in any way, and for a time she was distressed by a thousand fears.

Then she reasoned that she was in a city where crime and personal violence could not be committed with impunity.

Ned was a man now, too, and capable of looking out for himself personally; while, as far as principles were concerned, he was thoroughly good and pure, and she felt sure no one could have power to corrupt him.

It had been but an idle threat, uttered under the impulse of anger, she told herself, and she would not allow herself to be disturbed by it.

As she grew more composed she realized how literally true her words to Richard Heatherton had been; how utterly indifferent she was to him—how completely he had lost all power to move her to either love or hate.

Her love for him had indeed burned to ashes, and nothing could ever rekindle it.

As for the man himself, he went out of Benjamin Lawson's house wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement.

He had expected to browbeat the woman whom he had wronged into abject submission to his wishes, as he was wont to do years ago in his youth. But he had failed most miserably, and he had been made to realize instead, that he had been the destroyer of his own life and peace—that he had begun, in bitter earnest, to reap a harvest from the “wild oats” which he had sown twenty years ago.

He had more reason for fleeing from the country than was generally supposed when he had disappeared so suddenly after leaving college. Not only did he fear trouble from the proud young girl whom he had driven to desperation, but also from her furious father, who, upon learning how his daughter had been wronged, had sent him word that he “would shoot him like a dog if he should ever lay eyes upon him.” Then his own father and uncle had received an inkling of the story, and, becoming enraged over it and the enormous debts he had contracted during his college days, hotly denounced him, refused to pay his bills, and ordered him to go to work and take care of himself in the future.

With his cowardly heart full of fear and hatred, he had recklessly boarded the first steamer bound for Europe, and put the ocean between himself and the consequence of his misdeeds.

But, even after reaching England, he was haunted by a sense of insecurity, and so resolved to ship for Australia, where, he felt sure, no one connected with his former life would ever be able to find him.

While on his way to this country the man who shared his stateroom was taken suddenly ill and died, as he had

related to his uncle, and, resolving to make assurance doubly sure, he determined to destroy his identity by personating the dead man, and allowing all on board to believe that it was Richard Heatherton, of New York, U. S. A., who had died when two days at sea.

This he could the more easily do, since both had been seasick from the hour of starting, and having been confined to their state-room, no one had had an opportunity to identify either. The man told him, the first day out, that he had no friends—he had lost his family, and was trying to flee from his sorrow; therefore no inquiries would be made for him, and there was no fear that the deception would ever be discovered.

Having thus blotted himself out of existence, so to speak, he was prepared to begin a new life in the country whither he was going.

Being a good accountant, he readily found employment when he arrived in Sydney, and remained in the service of one firm for the next three or four years, and to whom he gave the name of Heath.

During this time he met Anita Castaldi, a beautiful Spanish girl, and the only child of a widow of great wealth.

The mother who was an invalid, and Richard, who was not fond of toiling for his living, and who found it difficult to support his expensive tastes upon his modest salary, resolved that he would win the girl and the fortune, which in the course of a few months must be hers.

The beautiful Spanish maiden was as lovely in character as in person, and, believing her handsome lover

to be all that he represented himself, she gave her heart unreservedly to the ardent suitor.

Anita's mother shared her daughter's belief in the moral worth of the young man, and willingly gave her consent to their union, feeling that she should thus have her darling happy in the care and protection of a noble and devoted husband.

Accordingly they were married by the woman's dying bed, and three weeks later, she passed away leaving her daughter sorrowing, but not inconsolable, over her loss, for, out of the fervor of her Spanish nature, she idolized her husband, and all other emotions were absorbed in this.

Then there began an ideal life for the young couple. Anita, utterly ignorant of all business, gave the entire control of her large fortune to her husband, who did not hesitate to spend it with the utmost freedom. They lived most luxuriously, and traveled extensively for a year after their marriage. Then a beautiful child, little Vera, was born, and, his wife, being somewhat delicate, Richard purchased a lovely villa on the shores of the Mediterranean, where he installed his family, surrounding them with every comfort and luxury, while he came and went according to his own will and pleasure.

But the warm-hearted, sensitive Anita was not long in discovering that she had surrendered herself and her fortune to a cruel and selfish nature. She believed that her husband loved her, after a fashion, but she was sure that she was secondary to his own wishes and desires, and it gradually dawned upon her, after long neglect

and indifference that her money rather than her own love and worth, had been the chief inducement to a marriage with her.

This conviction and the secret grief which preyed upon her in consequence soon began to sap her life. The tendrils of her loving nature had from the first entwined themselves about her husband—or rather about the ideal which she fondly imagined existed in him—but instead of gathering strength and support from him he had absorbed all vitality from her until her starved nature could endure no more and she began to droop and fail.

Slowly she faded—so slowly and so patiently and sweetly—never complaining or reproaching him that her husband did not realize her condition until one day, he returned from a long season of roving, and found her dying.

Then he awoke to a knowledge of her worth, and, for a time, sincerely mourned for her.

And yet, even in his mourning, he was utterly selfish, since he thought only of his loss and discomfort, in having his well-ordered home in confusion for the want of a mistress, rather than of the blighted life that had been cut short by his cruel neglect.

But, during these dark days, he began to realize that he had a child, who required his care; and Vera, the beautiful, dark-eyed little fairy, who was but a reproduction of her dead mother in miniature, made a place for herself in his heart, so winning him by her sweet and lovable ways that he soon grew to regard her with

an idolatrous affection of which no one, who had known him hitherto, would have believed him capable.

At the time of her mother's death Vera was ten years of age, and, the following summer, her father resolved that he would dispose of his beautiful villa where he was continually reminded of his cruel neglect of his wife and take his child with him, spend the remainder of the season in travel.

And so they roved from place to place as long as the weather permitted, leisurely enjoying their desultory, care-free life, the dainty child, who inherited the warm-hearted impulsiveness of her mother, growing to worship the father who devoted himself so exclusively to her, and believing him with childish credulity to be the truest and grandest man on earth.

When winter drew near he placed her in a convent in France and taking rooms in a hotel near the institution where they could see each other often he lived the life of a sybarite until warm weather returned when the two began their roving again.

For six years they lived this kind of life.

But Richard Heatherton, or Heath, that being the name under which he had married Anita Castaldi—grew more and more demoralized during that time.

His habits were far from being what they ought to have been; he had spent money lavishly, and the fortune which had come into his hand, and which should have been preserved for Vera, was fast melting away, so fast that he was really "getting quite close to the weather," as he had told Benjamin Lawson when he

finally drifted back to this country, and to the city of Boston.

When he first returned to his native soil the year previous to his meeting with his uncle, it was but natural that he should seek his old home in New York to ascertain if his parents were still living.

He hoped they were not; he hoped also to find that his uncle was dead and thus he should obtain possession of two snug fortunes and so be able to continue his roving and luxurious living.

But greatly to his disgust he learned that his parents were alive and well but that his father was on the verge of bankruptcy while Mr. Lawson had long since left New York, and no one could tell him whither he had gone.

Consequently he had no desire to reveal his identity to any one, and, putting Vera into a convent in Montreal for the winter, he wandered from place to place until spring opened, when he drifted to Boston, where he summoned Vera to join him; for, strange as it may seem, she was the one idol of his life, and he could not be long separated from her.

Upon leaving Mr. Lawson's house after his interview with Miriam, Richard Heatherton proceeded to Park street, thence across the Common toward Boylston street; but it was evident, from his lowering brow and dejected air, that he was in no enviable frame of mind.

"What shall I do?" he muttered, despondingly, as he stopped on a corner to wait for a car. "One thing I know I must do, before long, and that is—get Vera out of the country; it would break her heart, poor child, if

she should learn the truth about herself. Curse my luck! I would have given my right arm to have prevented this thing. And—Mathews! if I had dreamed that he intended to play me such a trick, I would have throttled him. Oh, my darling!—to think that this shame, which I believed belonged to another, should have fallen upon you!”

A groan of mingled pain and anger broke from him in view of what he had learned that day, then stepping upon a car, he rode, with gloomy eyes and sternly compressed lips out toward the Hotel Vendome.

CHAPTER IX.

GERTRUDE LANGMAID RECEIVES A STATLING PROPOSAL.

The day following Richard Heatherton's interview with his wife, Mr. Lawson and his household went to their summer residence at Nantasket.

Ned accompanied them to the boat to see them off, and, as he bade them good-by, promised to join them at the beach as early as possible on the coming Saturday.

That same morning he received the following note:

Boston, June 15, 18—

Dear Ned:—You will, perhaps, be surprised to learn that I am at home. I arrived yesterday, but only for a short visit. That will astonish you also, but mamma has not been well of late, and the doctor commands a sea voyage. Accordingly she and papa start for Europe next Saturday, and I am going back to Halifax to remain with mamma's friend, Mrs. Page, during the summer. Papa and mamma are in New York for a couple of days, making arrangements for their trip; meanwhile I am alone and want to be amused.

If you have no engagement for this afternoon, come to Arlington street, as soon as the bank closes, and John will drive us out to the Woodland Park Hotel, where a school-

mate of mine is spending the summer, and upon whom I have promised to call.

Hastily, but ever yours,

Gertrude.

Ned was both surprised and delighted as he read this note, which came to hand just as he was going to dinner.

He slipped it hastily into his pocket and hurried away to the restaurant, and, while waiting to have his lunch served, drew forth the morning paper, as was his custom, to pass away the time.

As he did so Gertrude's note came forth with the paper, and slipped unnoticed to the floor.

At least he did not see it drop, but another pair of eyes, which had been watching Ned ever since he entered the room, marked the dainty missive, as it fluttered under the table, with an eager, jealous glance.

Immediately after finishing his dinner, Ned hurriedly arose from the table and left the room; while his old enemy, Bill Bunting, who had been sitting a little back of him, immediately changed his seat, taking the one which Ned had just vacated.

He gave his order to the waiter, after which he stooped and stealthily secured the note which the unfortunate lover had dropped.

His eyes gleamed viciously as he boldly read it, and a smile of triumph curled his coarse lips, as he slipped it into a pocket of his vest, muttering:

"So the pretty little heiress is at home again. The proud minx gave me the cut direct the last time I met her, but I'm not going to stand any such kind of treatment as that. I've made up my mind to handle some

of the old money-bag's cash and I am not going to be balked for the want of a little cheek. The old folks are 'away for a couple of days'—wonder how it would do to call around at Arlington street some time to-morrow! Guess I'll try it—"faint heart never won fair lady," and I confess I'm awfully smitten."

Ned sped to Arlington street immediately after his duties at the bank were over.

He found Gertrude awaiting him, and the fair girl flushed rosily as she greeted him with even more than her accustomed cordiality.

"Did you think me very bold to invite you to drive with me?" she shyly questioned.

"No, indeed!" Ned answered, earnestly, "such a thought did not once occur to me. I was only too glad to be asked."

"Well, I did not want to drive way to Auburndale alone, and, besides, I had papa's sanction to the arrangement."

Ned flushed now with pleasure, for this concession on Mr. Langmaid's part assured him that that gentleman still regarded his suit with favor.

The following afternoon was delightful, the country beautiful, and the lovers enjoyed their drive and call most thoroughly; returning to Boston by moonlight in the evening.

The next morning, about eleven o'clock, Mr. William Hunting—alias Bunting—swaggered up the steps of No. — Arlington street with serene assurance, rang the bell, and inquired if Miss Langmaid was at home.

"Yes," the servant responded, then asked, as the

young man boldly stepped within the hall, "who shall I tell her has called?"

"Just say, please, that a gentleman wishes to see her upon a little matter of business," he replied, after pretending for a moment to search for a card.

The girl hesitated, glanced suspiciously at him, then, seeing that he was determined to carry his point, led the way into the reception room, after which she went upstairs to give her young mistress the message.

Gertrude looked somewhat annoyed upon being informed that her caller had not given his name.

"How stupid!" she exclaimed. "Likely as not it is some agent or peddler, and I cannot endure to talk with them."

Nevertheless, fearing that it might be some one whom she knew and would not like to treat with rudeness, she decided to go down.

She descended to the reception-room where she experienced a sudden shock of mingled anger and repulsion at finding herself face to face with Bill Bunting, the old-time enemy of her lover.

She drew herself up with some hauteur as she coldly inquired:

"To what am I indebted for this visit, sir?"

The fellow arose and bowed with great politeness, and Gertrude found herself wondering how he could have acquired so polished a manner, while she observed too, that he was dressed with great care and even elegance.

"Pray be seated, Miss Langmaid," he smilingly re-

marked, as he rolled a chair forward for her, "for I have a little matter which I wish to discuss with you."

"Thank you," the lovely girl calmly replied, as she laid her hand upon the back of the chair, but evidently with no intention of occupying it. "You spoke of a matter of buisiness—will you be kind enough to state the nature of it?"

Her quiet self-possession and her icy manner somewhat disconcerted her visitor, in spite of his bold assurance, and he flushed a dull red. But he had staked too much on this venture to be balked in his designs, and, with a sullen doggedness leaping into his eyes, he plunged at once to the heart of his purpose.

"Certainly," he said, still suave and affable, "although no doubt it will be something of a surprise to you—I am here this morning for the purpose of craving the hand of Miss Gertrude Langmaid in marriage."

Had a thunderbolt exploded at her feet, Gertrude could not have been more stunned for the moment, and the look of amazement which overspread her face, plainly indicated that she had not had a suspicion regarding the real object of his call.

This was quickly followed by a feeling hot indignation, and a flame of anger shot into her eyes.

"Sir!" she began, but with a deprecatory wave of his hand, he interrupted her:

"I have shocked you, Miss Langmaid," he said, "and I ask your pardon; but, really, your icy command forced the truth from me more abruptly than I could have desired. Do not condemn me unheard for my apparent presumption," he went on hastily, as she made an ef-

fort to silence him. "I must justify myself to this extent—must confess that I love you with a passion of which you can have no conception. I have loved you ever since I first saw you—when I stood, a barefoot boy, one Sunday, by the drinking fountain at the entrance to Beacon street and Commonwealth avenue, more than ten years ago. Doubtless you will feel anything but complimented by such an avowal, but it will at least prove the endurance of my affection, while, in this free land, where a pauper may become a statesman, or a beggar a millionaire in a decade of years the change in my own circumstances has emboldened me to make the confession. By my own efforts I have risen to an honorable position in life, and today I feel justified in offering you my hand and asking yours in return. Oh, Miss Langmaid, tell me that you will listen to my suit—that you will give me hope, courage, and inspiration for the future, by becoming my wife."

He had spoken rapidly and with increasing earnestness, and with every appearance of the utmost sincerity.

But Gertrude, knowing as she did, how false to all honor and principle he had always been—how treacherous toward Ned; how lacking in chivalry and true respect for womanhood, was sensible only of a feeling of loathing and abhorrence toward him.

"Your wife!" she repeated, in a low tone, that was rendered intense from these emotions, "the wife of a man of your reputation!—of a man who has been a thief! Who accosts and insults unprotected girls in the streets! Really, sir, your presumption might be amusing but for its brazen insolence——"

The man sprang angrily to his feet as these scathing sentences fell upon his ears.

"Have a care!" he cried, hoarsely, and interrupting her, "you do not know the nature you are arousing. Miss Langmaid. I offer you, in all sincerity, my hand, my heart, and my fortune—for I have lately come into the possession of that which will bring me a large fortune. And surely it is not kind to twit me with the mistakes and indiscretions of my past, and which I now deeply deplore. Let my love for you plead——"

"We will not discuss the subject further," Gertrude haughtily interposed. "It is utterly impossible that I could for a moment entertain your proposal——"

"Perhaps you expect some day to bestow your coveted hand upon that upstart of a Ned Wallingford, her would-be suitor sneered without giving her an opportunity to complete her sentence.

Gertrude did not deign to make any reply to this jealous attack upon her lover, although she wondered if he had never heard of the change in Ned's name.

"Talk about a 'thief!'" he went on, maliciously, "your hero is far from being immaculate in that respect—there is, you know, such a thing as a distinction without a difference."

"What do you mean!" Gertrude demanded, with flashing eyes, and thoroughly aroused by this vindictive slur.

"Oh, I forgot that you have been away from home of late, and have not perhaps heard of Wallingford's unfaithfulness to his trust."

"What do you mean?" Gertrude sternly repeated.

"Then you did not hear how he robbed the —— Bank of a large amount of money?"

"I do not believe it," cried the fair girl, excitedly, but her red lips trembled and paled as she said it. "He could never have done such a thing without it being known to the public."

"Don't be too sure, my fair lady. What I have told you is true, but the bank officials hushed up the matter through the influence of one of the directors, who threw himself into the breach to save the culprit."

"It is false! Ned never would be guilty of an act so dishonorable." Gertrude exclaimed, but with a sinking heart for the fellow spoke so confidently that his words somehow carried conviction with them.

"I tell you he has," Bill Bunting responded. "But wait and see and, mark my words he will yet prove it by even worse crimes; I predict that he will yet occupy a private apartment in a public institution not so very far from Arlington street. But that is neither here nor there—I didn't come here to discuss my rival's virtues or faults—I came to test my own fate. Miss Langmaid, I ask you once more, will you be my wife?"

"No—a thousand times no; you are utterly obnoxious to me. I would not be your wife even though you possessed the wealth and position of a prince of royal birth——"

"But possibly you might be tempted to wed a poverty-stricken bank clerk, with a handsome face and figure," sarcastically interposed her companion. "Don't try me too far, Miss Langmaid, or you may live to re-

gret it; and, as you well know, I have no love for Ned Wallingford."

"Ned at least does not require the protection of an alias to secure him the entree of the homes of respectable people. Good-morning, Mr. Bunting," and with this cutting thrust and dismissal, the proud and spirited girl touched the electric button by the door, near which she stood, then turned and walked from the room.

Meeting a servant in the hall, she said, in a tone intended also for the ear of the man she had just left:

"Sarah, show the man in the reception-room out, and never come to me again without the card or the name of a caller."

She swept upstairs, a hot flush on her face, while the chagrined aspirant for her hand just caught sight of her vanishing silken skirt, as, preceded by the servant who held the door open for him, he made his way out of the house.

His brow was black with anger, and he strode down the steps to the street, muttering threats of vengeance as he went.

"Oh, I will bring down that proud little head of yours, my haughty jade, before you are many months older," he hissed between his tightly locked teeth, "and you shall yet find yourself in a position where you will be glad to marry me, while your equally proud lover shall occupy a prison cell, at least if certain schemes do not fail."

Gertrude did believe one word of the miserable story regarding Ned, which Bill Bunting had told her.

She had the utmost faith in her lover's truth and

honor; yet the arrow rankled and made her nervous and unhappy.

She could not believe that Ned could have done anything wrong at the bank and still be retained there in his position.

Still Bill Bunting had spoken so confidently and seemed to know that some one had interposed to save Ned, that it gave an air of plausibility to the tale.

She knew that Mr. Lawson was one of the directors, and that, if there had been anything wrong, he would do all in his power to shield Ned. She remembered, too, that Ned had not appeared quite like himself during their drive yesterday—there had been moments when he seemed to forget himself and where he was, and become absorbed in deep thought, then he would arouse himself with an effort, and be quite gay and natural for a time.

More than this, he had looked thin and pale; but, when she had spoken of it, expressing the fear that he was working too hard, he had smiled fondly at her and said he was perfectly well; that he did not have even enough work to keep his time as fully occupied as he would like.

“I will never believe it,” she cried out again, as, in her own room, she thought over all these things, but with an anxious fear in her heart, “if all the world accused him I would defend him; I know that Ned is incorruptible, and it must be only a malicious fabrication of that wretch, for—how could he have become possessed of any such knowledge—even if it was true—if the bank officials agreed not to divulge it? No, it

can only be a falsehood—my dear boy is good and honest, brave and true, and no one shall ever weaken my confidence in him.”

Such was the faith which the true-hearted girl had in her lover, while she was happily unconscious of the crucial test to which, ere long, it was to be subjected.

CHAPTER X.

NED IS INVITED TO GO YACHTING.

Ned found himself somewhat lonely after the departure of Mr. Lawson and his mother for Nantasket; and after his return from Auburndale with Gertrude, the house on Mount Vernon street, as he entered it, seemed more desolate and forlorn than he had thought possible.

He did not feel like retiring immediately, so bringing forth his books, he sat down for a season of reading and study until he should begin to get sleepy.

But even his books ceased to interest him after a time, and he threw them aside and fell to musing.

He had much enjoyed his drive and the companionship of the fair girl whom he so sincerely loved.

He knew that she still loved him, for her every look and tone plainly indicated it. He believed that Mr. Langmaid still favored his suit, or he never would have allowed Gertrude to send him that note, inviting him to accompany her on the visit to her friend.

But—how would they regard him if they knew of the blight which had rested upon him, ever since he

made that unfortunate business trip the preceding winter?

He was never long by himself without dropping into this train of painful musing—without living over again the experiences of his trip to Albany and its fatal result.

His life now was one long, ceaseless regret and rebellion against the misfortune which had so handicapped him at the very outset of his promising career.

True, Mr. Lawson believed in him, and had done everything to shield him from the evil consequences of that calamity. The bank officials, too, had been very kind, and given him the benefit of the doubt regarding the real thief; but at the same time he knew that he was a marked man—that his every act was closely watched, and that he could never regain his former footing in the institution until the mystery of the stolen money and bonds could be explained.

It was very discouraging, and he wondered, to-night, as he sat there in Mr. Lawson's library alone, what Gertrude would say if she should learn what had happened; this thought had made him absent-minded and depressed that afternoon while riding with her; he wondered also what Mr. Langmaid's attitude toward him would be. Might he not refuse to sanction an engagement with his idolized daughter? Would he not be likely to feel that he could not have the dignity and prestige of his family compromised by a union with one upon whom such a blight must rest until the true culprit was discovered?

Ned became so absorbed in these unhappy thoughts

that he took no note of time, and the hours sped by, while a muffled figure, outside, kept passing and re-passing the house, and muttering angrily every now and then because of the light which still burned in the library, thus telling that some one was awake and watchful.

But at length a distant clock chimed the hour of one, and Ned started up, surprised to find how late it was.

Whether he was guided by some instinct of impending danger, or whether the feeling of excessive loneliness made him doubly careful, he could not have told; but he went all over the house and carefully examined every door and window in it.

Of course he discovered that the window behind the writing desk had been left unfastened.

He was considerably surprised to find it thus, but supposed it had been overlooked through the carelessness of one of the servants while cleaning it.

He secured it, and then having seen that everything else was safe, he retired to his own room and to bed; while that figure outside, which had been watching his every movement, turned with a fierce oath of disappointment, and disappeared from the locality.

Two days later—Saturday—just at noon and when the bank was on the point of closing, Mr. Cranston spoke to Ned, who was at work at one of the desks.

“Heatherton, where is Mr. Butler?” he inquired.

“He went out a moment ago—he said he had an important engagement.”

“That is unfortunate,” said Mr. Cranston, looking

grave. "I am to leave for my vacation this afternoon, and I wanted to hand to him the keys to the safe and vaults, as he is to take my place while I am gone."

"Did he know you were going to-day?" Ned asked.

"No; I did not expect to go until Monday, but circumstances compel me to start this evening. Let me see," Mr. Cranston interposed, reflectively. "Mr. Butler is spending the summer at Nantasket, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir; he goes back and forth every day."

"Hum—didn't I hear you say that you were going down this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir; I am going to spend Sunday with my mother and Mr. Lawson."

"Well, then, why can't you take the keys to Mr. Butler?"

"I will, sir, if you wish," Ned readily replied.

"Thank you—I have a few minutes more writing to do, then I will lock up and hand them to you, if you are not in a hurry."

"I am not—I can wait as well as not."

"What boat do you take?"

"Two o'clock, sir," Ned replied, as he began to put away his own work preparatory to leaving the bank, while the cashier disappeared within his private office.

Just before Mr. Cranston asked Ned where Mr. Butler was, a man had had a check cashed, and, moving a little away from the counter, had stationed himself by a large pillar, where he carefully folded the crisp new bills and arranged them nicely in his wallet.

He had thus been hidden from the cashier, who supposed that he had left the room, and gave no thought

to him, while Ned was behind a tall desk and had not observed him at all.

All the man's movements were characterized by great deliberation, while he appeared to be entirely absorbed in what he was doing.

But not a word of the foregoing conversation had escaped him, and his eyes, though downcast, burned with a fierce, exultant glitter that might have been very significant if it had been observed.

As Mr. Cranston vanished within his sanctum the man walked swiftly and noiselessly from the bank, thence to Washington street, where he boarded a car for Bowe's Wharf.

A ride of twenty minutes brought him thither, and, making his way toward an open space on the pier, he took a folded handkerchief from his pocket, shook it out until it floated lightly on the breeze, and then, vigorously wiped his nose.

Two or three times, at intervals, he repeated this act, until away in the distance he saw a boat put off from a graceful yacht that was lying at anchor in the harbor, and made directly for the spot where he was standing.

He remained motionless until the craft reached the pier, when a sailor wound a rope around a post to fasten it, then clambered up the rude steps to his side.

"Is everything in sailing trim, Sims?" he inquired, in a low tone.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Plenty of provisions, coal and wine on board?"

"Ay, ay, sir—closets and bins are full, sir."

"Then wait about here until I come again—I expect to be back about two; if I do not come by that time you can return to the yacht and await another signal."

"All right, sir," responded the sailor, touching his cap respectfully, as his companion turned from him and walked back toward the pier from which the Nantasket boats sailed.

Reaching this, he seated himself where he could command a good view of every person passing to or from the steamer. Not a person came or went unnoticed; his quick, sharp eyes scanned every face with an eager look of interest, which betokened some deep purpose at heart.

It was a long time to wait—from twelve-thirty until two—but the man exhibited no signs of impatience; it was like the silent, passive, but intent watching of a cat, before the hole of a mouse—an alert, persistent vigilance, that was ready to pounce upon its victim the instant it appeared in sight.

About fifteen minutes before two the watcher espied a lithe manly form coming down the long walk, with a quick, firm step, and rising, he leisurely sauntered toward it.

"How are you, Heatherton?" he exclaimed, in tones of general welcome which had a note of surprise in them, as if the meeting was wholly unexpected. "Going down the harbor this afternoon?"

"Ah! Mr. Gould; how are you, sir?" Ned responded. "Yes, I'm bound for Nantasket for over Sunday."

"Pleasant place—right pleasant! and just the day for such a trip," Mr. Gould responded, appreciatively. "I'm

about starting for the same place myself for a few days' outing—only I'm going by yacht instead of by steamer."

"By yacht! are you?" exclaimed Ned, his face lighting eagerly, for a yacht was his delight.

During previous summers he had often been invited by gentlemen to accompany them upon their trips; but this year he had not even been on board a yacht of any description.

"Well," he added, with a quickly repressed sigh, "you couldn't have a nicer afternoon for the trip."

"That is so, only I invited a friend to go with me, and he has disappointed me, and I am rather upset to have to take the sail alone." Mr. Gould remarked, with a somewhat downcast air. "Say," he added, as if the idea had suddenly struck him, "why can't you come along with me, if you do not mind the extra time it will take? Are you fond of yachting?"

"Yes, indeed, and I have not put my foot upon the deck of a yacht this year," Ned said, eagerly. "Your invitation is a great temptation, and I have a mind to accept it," he added, thoughtfully.

"Come on, then—there'll be a crowd on the steamer this afternoon, for most of the city clerks have a half-holiday—and we'll have a cozy time by ourselves. I imagine there's a boat waiting for me now—I was loitering about in the hope that I should find some one to keep me company," and linking his arm familiarly within Ned's, the wily schemer led him, all unsuspecting of any trap, toward the end of the pier, where the boat from the yacht was moored.

It took but a moment to seat themselves within it, and in another they were speeding over the water, propelled by the strong, steady strokes of the sailor who handled the oars.

"What a beautiful yacht!" Ned exclaimed, enthusiastically, as they drew near the graceful vessel, which looked like a huge white bird resting upon the still water, "and a steam yacht, too. Does it belong to you?"

"Yes, and she is indeed a beauty, as you say," the man replied, as his glance rested proudly on the gleaming sails:—"a fast sailer, too. She is not so very large, but stanch and trustworthy. I've a most efficient crew, and I'll give you a good time this afternoon. Here we are, my young friend—welcome aboard the 'Bald Eagle.' "

The boat ran smoothly up to the flight of iron steps which led to the deck. Mr. Gould stepped out and stood one side to allow Ned to pass up before him, as he thus bade him welcome.

The vessel was perhaps a hundred feet long, of very graceful proportions, painted white, with narrow bands of gilt, and otherwise beautifully finished with natural woods.

Everything about her was taut and trim, and daintily clean, and, with white sails spread, Ned thought she was like a spotless swan riding her native element with stately grace.

Mr. Gould gave some order in a low tone to one of the sailors who came forward and touched his hat at his approach, then led his companion about the deck

to allow him to examine his surroundings at his leisure, while he explained the construction, arrangement and working of different portions of the vessel. When they had made a thorough examination of the deck, he inquired if Ned would like to go below.

He signified his desire to do so, and they spent some time looking about the elegant saloon and other portions of the vessel, which were complete in all their appointments.

Leading from the saloon there were two beautiful state-rooms which seemed like home bed-rooms. The walls were hung with satin—one with crimson, one with blue, padded and perfumed, and buttoned, like a handsomely upholstered chair.

The carpets were fine moquette of an exquisite pattern; the furniture of some natural foreign wood beautifully inlaid with pearl and other woods. The beds were curtained and spread with finest lace, while the toilet articles were of a costly china; and in one corner of the blue room Ned espied a pretty wicker rocker and a dainty work basket, and he wondered if Mr. Gould had a wife who accompanied him upon his various trips.

There were three ordinary state-rooms, with two berths in each, although Mr. Gould only opened one for Ned's inspection, explaining that they were all alike; but they were rich and complete in every appointment, and the young man was enthusiastic over everything he saw.

When they returned to the saloon, after visiting the party, cook-room, and the sailors' cabin, they found

a tempting little lunch awaiting them, and Mr. Gould, pointing to a seat, invited Ned to join him, remarking that he had had no dinner, and was hungry.

They spent an hour at the table chatting in a sociable way, Mr. Gould making himself very entertaining by relating numerous experiences and adventures of his past life, for he had been an extensive traveler in various countries, and Ned thought him more agreeable than ever.

After they had eaten their dessert, the man ordered a bottle of champagne to "finish off with," but Ned politely declined, saying he never indulged in wines of any kind, whereupon Mr. Gould ordered a cup of coffee to be brought to him instead.

Ned wondered why the vessel did not start on her trip, and began to be somewhat impatient at the delay, as he was anxious to reach Nantasket before Mr. Lawson's dinner-hour, lest his mother should worry on his account, but he felt delicate about questioning his host regarding the matter, and kept hoping that they would soon weigh anchor and sail.

As they arose from the table Ned stooped to pick up a nut which he had dropped, resting one hand upon the edge while doing so.

Almost at the same instant he heard a crash and the jingle of glass, while something cold trickled over his head; and looking up, he saw that Mr. Gould had upset and broken a wine glass, spilling the contents upon his hand.

"A thousand pardons!" the gentleman exclaimed, regretfully; "that was exceedingly awkward of me; but

just step into yonder state-room for a wash, and you will then be all right again—you will find water and towels, and anything else that you may need.”

He crossed the saloon, opened the door, and held it while Ned passed in.

Then it was quietly shut, and, with a strange shock of surprise, accompanied by a feeling of dismay, Ned heard the key turned and the bolt shoot into its socket, when the conviction suddenly flashed upon him that he had been decoyed aboard that vessel for some foul purpose—that he was a prisoner at the mercy of a cunning and heartless villain, though just what the man’s intentions regarding him might be he could not at that moment comprehend.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. LAWSON RECEIVES BAD NEWS.

Ned, as soon as he could recover himself sufficiently, sprang to the door and tried it with all his strength.

Of course he could not open it—it did not yield in the slightest to his efforts.

“Mr. Gould,” he called excitedly. “What does this outrage mean? Let me out at once!”

There was no response to this demand; there was no sound. The most intense silence prevailed everywhere.

“Let me out, sir!” Ned shouted again; but, as before, there came no answer to his call.

Again he exerted all his strength to open the door; he pounded upon it to attract attention; then, these ef-

forts being unnoticed, he kicked vigorously at one of the panels, hoping that he might be able to break through.

But he might as well have kicked against a rock, for the door was too strong and well made for him to make any impression upon it other than to mar its beautiful finish.

"What does it all mean?" he cried, at length desisting from his efforts to get out, and trying to compose himself sufficiently to consider his situation.

Then, like a flash, a conviction of the truth came to him, filling him with a sickening, benumbing horror.

It must have been known, by some means, that the key to the bank, also those to the safe and vaults were in his possession!

It was his duty, always, to unlock the bank in the morning, and to lay out certain books and papers before the arrival of the clerks and other officials; so of course the key to the outside of the building was in his possession besides those other precious keys to the treasure of the institution, the keys that had been intrusted to his keeping.

And now he believed that he was in the power of a villain, who, by some means, had gained knowledge of the fact, and who had decoyed him to the yacht for the purpose of obtaining them.

Now he understood why the boat had not started on the proposed trip to Nantasket. He did not believe that Mr. Gould had any intention of going thither, but, instead, had planned to make him a prisoner in order to secure the keys in his possession, that he might rob

the bank that very night, or during the coming Sabbath. The idea was too horrible to contemplate.

What could he do? How could he save the untold treasure which lay in the heart of that building, and for which he could be held accountable by the officers of the bank? How could he save himself from the power of the traitor who had lured him hither?

All strength seemed to forsake him as these thoughts flashed through his brain.

He sank upon a chair and dropped his head upon the edge of the berth with a groan of despair over his utter helplessness to do anything to mitigate his terrible situation.

"I believe I shall go mad!" he cried, after a moment, and again starting to his feet. "This will be the second time that I shall appear to have been false to my trust. They will all believe that I have robbed the bank and absconded with my ill-gotten booty. I may be murdered here and sunk to the bottom of the ocean, and no one will ever know the truth, while the wretch who perpetrates the deed will be thousands of miles away over the ocean, enjoying the gold for which I am sacrificed."

Ned paced the narrow room, feeling as if his brain was on fire, his face almost convulsed with agony, a gleam of desperation in his eyes.

"My reputation will be ruined," he almost sobbed. "I could die—gladly—if I could but save the bank and have the officers believe me true to my trust. Mr. Lawson, too, will lose faith in me, and—it will kill my mother! Oh, God! help! save!"

The poor fellow's agony of mind was something terrible to witness.

He threw himself into the lower berth almost convulsed with the sense of impending evil and the thought of his ruined reputation, his mother's grief, and Mr. Lawson's apparently betrayed confidence.

But he could not lie there long. He soon sprang to his feet again, almost wild with despair, and seizing a chair, dashed it with all his strength against the door.

"Oh! I will not submit to such an outrage!" he cried. "I will defend myself to the death! I will not yield without a terrible struggle. Whoever comes to try to overpower me shall at least have a taste of my strength. I will lay some one low before they shall conquer me and wrest these keys from my possession."

But poor Ned reckoned without his host, for, even as he spoke, his strength suddenly forsook him, the chair dropped from his nerveless hands, his limbs refused to sustain him, and, staggering back, he sank again upon his berth, a strange heaviness and drowsiness beginning to creep over him and rendering him almost powerless.

"What does this mean?" he muttered, his eyes rolling wildly in the effort to conquer the stupor, which seemed to benumb his senses, while his face grew crimson, and a sensation of invisible cords binding all his muscles and joints came over him. Then, with a terrible heart-sinking, he almost screamed, as a feeling of suffocation and deadly faintness rendered him nearly helpless: "Oh! he has poisoned me; but—I will not die thus!"

He made a superhuman effort, started up again, seized the pitcher of water, pouring out a bowlful, and dashed the cool liquid over his face, dipping his whole head into it, in the hope of bringing relief to his heated brain.

He tore off his necktie and collar, threw open his shirt, and deluged his heaving chest, rubbing himself vigorously, and even pinching his flesh cruelly to try and restore the sensation of feeling.

For a moment these efforts revived him, but soon the faintness and deadly sickness began to steal over him again, and he knew he must succumb.

He was growing blind now, and groping back to the berth, he fell heavily into it, moaning :

“Oh, Heaven! Oh, mother! To die like this with such a stain on my young life, when I meant to be so true, so noble all my life long! And Gertrude, my love, you are lost to me forever! You, too, will believe me false to all honor! Oh! I am indeed lost! lost!”

His voice had gradually grown fainter until it now ceased, and he lay breathing heavily and muttering unintelligibly, with a look of heartrending agony upon his fine young face.

Five minutes later he was utterly unconscious.

The work of the crafty villain who had lured him hither had been thoroughly done, and the fate of the —— bank lay in his hands.

It was a lovely evening. There was not a cloud to be seen as the sun sank in golden splendor behind old ocean, which seemed almost like a sea of glass in the gradually softening and fading light.

Benjamin Lawson and Miriam Heatherton were sitting upon the veranda of their cottage, waiting for the coming of Ned. They had expected him early in the afternoon, and were greatly disappointed when the three o'clock boat came and went and he did not appear.

Four, five, six and still he did not come. Dinner could not be delayed without spoiling, and Miriam insisted that Mr. Lawson should eat while it was fresh and hot.

Afterward they had both repaired to the veranda where they watched the gorgeous sunset and tried not to betray how impatient they were for the coming of him whom they both so dearly loved.

The far-off horizon beyond the water was taking on a purple haze when a messenger boy approached and handed Mr. Lawson a telegram.

The man's cheek paled a trifle as he tore it open with a sense of impending evil, while as he ran his eye hastily over the few words which the message contained a low exclamation of pain broke from him.

Mrs. Heatherton, who was breathlessly watching him, felt her heart bound into her throat, then sink heavily in her bosom with some undefined fear.

"Is it anything about Ned?" she tremulously inquired.

"No; but my only sister, Rachel Heatherton is—dead," Mr. Lawson replied, with faltering lips, tears starting into his aged eyes. "She has been very delicate for many years, and this morning the end came very suddenly."

"Then it is true," Miriam murmured, flushing a vivid scarlet.

"What is true?" Mr. Lawson inquired, a trifle sharply, while he bent a searching glance upon her.

Under the influence of the sudden shock occasioned by the telegram he had forgotten that he intended to keep his relationship to Miriam and Ned a secret, and had spoken unguardedly.

"That—you are his—Richard Heatherton's uncle!" Miriam faltered, with considerable embarrassment.

"Yes, it is true," the old man admitted; "but who has been telling you anything about it?"

"He—Richard Heatherton himself—told me."

"What!—when?" demanded Mr. Lawson, sharply, for he had not suspected that she even knew that the man was living.

"Only last Tuesday he forced his way into your house—into my presence, and revealed the truth to me," the sensitive woman confessed, with burning cheeks and pained eyes.

"The villain!" muttered her companion, with a frown.

"I have felt like some miserable imposter ever since," Miriam went on, tremulously, "for he accused me of having cunningly wormed myself into your home and confidence in order to benefit myself pecuniarily, and for the purpose of ingratiating Ned into your favor——"

"But you did not—you did not know of the relationship," Mr. Lawson interposed, regarding her keenly.

"I never dreamed of such a thing," she returned, lift-

ing her clear eyes to his face, and speaking with an earnestness not to be doubted. "I have often wondered why you were so strangely kind to us, but I attributed it only to your natural goodness of heart, which had been aroused, perhaps, by the fact that your agent had not used us honorably, and by our dire necessity. I have tried to show you my gratitude, by trying to make your home comfortable and pleasant, without a thought of ever—ever winning anything for either Ned or myself, beyond the generous sum which you have given me and the privileges we have enjoyed. I hope you believe me," she concluded, appealingly.

She looked so distressed, by the fear that he might think she had been artfully intriguing for his money, that he was deeply touched.

"I do believe you," he gently answered; "and let me assure you, Miriam Heatherton, that you have made my life very pleasant during the years that you have spent with me, while I have grown to love Ned as if he were my own son. But it is true that Richard Heatherton is my nephew. I, too, met him last Tuesday, when he appealed to me for money and to be reinstated in my favor. Shall I?—do you think I ought?" the man asked, and waited eagerly for her reply.

The gentle woman flushed again.

"I hope you will do whatever you feel to be right," she said, in a low tone. "He is your only sister's son, and, of course, you are the best judge regarding his claims upon you. I suppose, according to the law of heritage, he is your heir, now that Mrs. Heatherton is gone."

"And Ned would inherit from his father later on," Mr. Lawson supplemented, with incisive abruptness.

Miriam was deeply hurt, for it almost seemed as if he suspected her of having had designs upon his fortune, in spite of his previous assertion to the contrary.

"Neither Ned nor I would ever accept a dollar from the man who deserted us in our sore need," she returned, with quiet dignity, although her voice trembled with suppressed emotion. "I doubt that Richard Heatherton would have much to leave, no matter how large an amount he might inherit from you or others; but, if he should die worth millions I would never claim a dollar of it. I could take no comfort in living upon money left by the man who had wronged and repudiated me."

"Then you do not still regard him with anything of affection; it would not wound you if I refuse to own him?" the old man inquired, leaning toward the fair woman and searching her face earnestly.

She made a gesture of repulsion that was far more expressive than the strongest assertion would have been.

"I have not the slightest affection for him," she said. "All love was strangled, crushed out of my heart, when he made the terrible statement that he had 'only been making a dupe of me to amuse himself;' that 'he had never any intention of making me his wife.' It is said," she continued, with a sigh, "that 'true love never dies;' that no matter how unworthy its object, it will survive the severest test; but I do not believe it; for, from that hour when my very soul seemed torn in

twain by the horrible things he told me, I have loathed every thought of Richard Heatherton; and even had he returned to me then, reformed and penitent, and offered to make me his wife, I do not think my love could ever have revived. I do not believe," and her sweet tones quivered with the intensity of her feeling, "that women have any right to forgive wrongs such as mine. Men imagine that they can ride high-handed over the sacred rights of womanhood, trampling upon all that is tenderest in her nature, and be forgiven and reinstated whenever it suits their mood or convenience to return to her, or be received with smiles and favors by the next one upon whom they see fit to bestow their attentions. Thus the world goes on, and the mightiest wrongs are condoned; the sin against my sex increases, the lives of thousands of pure and innocent girls are ruthlessly wrecked every year, and still their destroyers go unscathed. But a day of reckoning must surely come, when God will avenge the heart-broken and oppressed."

She was deeply moved, and had spoken rapidly and passionately; but now she suddenly checked herself and proceeded to relate, in a more composed manner, all that had occurred during her recent interview with Richard Heatherton.

"I am very glad you have opened your heart to me so freely, Miriam," Mr. Lawson responded, in a tone of unusual kindness, when she concluded, and addressing her by her Christian name for the first time. "I am glad also that you are so determined never to acknowledge as your husband the man who has so cruelly

wronged you. I could do a great deal for your sake and Ned's, but I do not believe that I could ever forgive Richard Heatherton for his heartlessness toward his parents, his reckless indifference to my long-continued kindness, and worse than all else, his villainy toward his gentle wife and noble boy. I have long suspected that you were the girl whom my nephew wronged;—the name you bore and something about Ned's looks and ways suggested the possibility of it. Of course I knew the truth after you received your marriage certificate and letter from Dr. Harris, and confided your history to me. But for various reasons I have refrained from revealing my relationship to you. I will be frank, and tell you that having had my confidence and kindness so betrayed by my nephew, I resolved to test both you and Ned in every possible way, and if you proved worthy, I resolved that I would make Ned my heir. He is a noble boy—he has never in a single instance failed to come up to my expectations, although I have tried him in many ways, and six months ago I made my will and, with the exception of a few bequests, he will have the whole of my fortune by and by. I tell you this to-night because I must leave on the next boat in order to catch the night express for New York, and I wanted you to know the truth and my intentions, in case anything should happen to me while I am away. I am an old man, and my life may be cut short in a few hours, even as my sister's has been. Still I hope to return to you, and enjoy for some years longer the pleasant home which you have made for me.

"I wish Ned had come, though. I do not like to leave without seeing him; but doubtless something unforeseen has detained him or he would have been here long ago. Mrs. Heatherton," and here the old gentleman sighed heavily, "will be buried on Monday, and I shall return by boat the same evening, so I shall not be long away. Now, if you will put up a few needful things for me in my satchel, I shall be obliged to you, as I must leave on the nine o'clock steamer."

He arose as he spoke, and entered the house with a weary air, going directly to the library, where he shut himself in as if he desired to be left alone with his grief, and though Miriam wished most earnestly to give some expression to the grateful emotions with which his recent confidence had filled her, she felt that it was hardly the time to do so, while his heart was so heavy over the sudden loss of his only sister.

She felt a little anxious about his going to New York alone, and an unusual sense of loneliness oppressed her, as she collected the things which he would need on his journey, while she pondered what could have kept Ned so late.

CHAPTER XII.

CONSTERNATION REIGNS AT THE BANK.

A half hour later Mr. Lawson was ready for his trip, and Mrs. Heatherton walked nearly down to the boat-landing with him, in the hope that she should meet Ned on the way, as she thought he surely must come by the nine o'clock steamer.

She saw that it had arrived when they came in sight of the pier, so she walked on as near as she could to avoid the crowd; but there was no sign of Ned, and she was at last forced to say good-by to Mr. Lawson, cautioning him to take good care of himself while he was away.

"Good-night, Miriam," he responded, shaking her by the hand, while his voice lingered over her name as if he loved to speak it. "Somehow you have grown to seem like a daughter to me this evening, and I shall be glad to come home to you again. Bid Ned good-by for me."

He left her then, and she turned back toward the house, walking slowly, hoping even then, that Ned would overtake her before she reached it.

She was beginning to feel quite nervous, for this was the last boat that would arrive that night, and it seemed as if she could not spend it alone in the house, with only the servants for company.

"What can keep him so late?" she murmured, as she went up the steps to the veranda and threw herself into a chair, while she turned her eyes wistfully toward the steamer, which was blowing the last whistle, to warn all who wished to return to the city that they must hasten or be left behind.

A few moments later she saw the lights swing slowly away from the pier, and watched them, with a strange heart-singing, as they moved out into the channel and finally, rounding a curve, disappeared from sight.

Still Ned came not, though he had had ample time,

even if he had met Mr. Lawson and turned back to see him off, as she hoped he might have done, and just then, away in the distance, a tethered dog set up a dismal howl, the sound sending a painful shiver through her tense nerves.

"What can it mean?" she cried, in a sharp, anxious tone and, unable longer to endure the gloom and loneliness outside, she went indoors.

She sought the cook and gave her orders regarding breakfast, and then herself attended to the closing of the cottage for the night, but with an oppressive sense of fear and impending evil at her heart.

Afterward she sat a long time reading, or trying to read, for she found it impossible to fix her thoughts upon any subject until finally the clock chimed the hour of one, when she put aside her book and reluctantly retired to rest.

She slept but fitfully, waking almost every hour and hearing two or three times the dismal howl of that tethered dog repeated.

"Oh!" she cried out once in sudden terror, when just at daybreak she heard it for the last time, "I am not superstitious, but it seems as if something dreadful is about to happen to me. If Ned fails to come by the first boat this morning I believe I shall go distracted."

Not being able to go to sleep again, she arose early as it was and went down to the beach for a bath, hoping thus to quiet her unsettled nerves.

She felt both refreshed and invigorated by it, and considerably cheered as well, as the sun came rolling up in unclouded splendor over the wide expanse of water.

On her return to the cottage, she busied herself in various ways, arranging some wild flowers and grasses which she had gathered, attending personally to the breakfast-table, seeing that it was daintily spread with what was choicest and most appetizing in the house, for she had resolved not to eat until the boat arrived, when she fondly hoped that Ned would come to share the meal with her.

The steamer came at nine.

She watched it from the veranda as it moved up to the pier where it discharged its passengers, reloaded and sailed away again; but Ned came not.

Miriam Heatherton was a woman not much given to tears; she had wept their fountain dry during those wretched days of her youth and it took a great deal to move her from the almost stoical calm she had acquired by continual suppression of emotion; but as the steamboat's pennon disappeared around the bend in the river, she left her post on the veranda, went to her room with a sinking heart, and throwing herself upon her bed gave expression to her grief and fear by a fit of passionate weeping.

* * * * *

Monday morning, when the head bookkeeper reached the —— Bank, just as the clock was striking the hour of nine, he found the doors fast locked, and no signs of life about the building.

A look of surprise leaped into his eyes, for it was the first occasion in his experience, that the institution had failed to be opened promptly on time.

Ned, especially, had always had the doors open, and every thing in order for the business of the day, ever since the keys had first been intrusted to him.

Presently he was joined by a brother clerk.

"Halloa, Cummings! what's up! can't you get in?" the clerk cried.

"No, young Heatherton doesn't seem to have got around this morning," Mr. Cummings responded.

"Hum! he went to Nantasket on Saturday, didn't he?"

"Yes; he said he was going to spend Sunday with his mother, and—he had the keys of the safes and vaults to take to Mr. Butler."

"Ha!" exclaimed the man with a start, "I hope nothing has happened to him. It is time he was here if he came on the first boat, isn't it?"

"Yes, for here comes Mr. Butler himself," replied Cummings. "Perhaps he has seen Heatherton, and can explain his absence."

A portly, fine-looking gentleman joined them just at that moment and looked the surprise he experienced, at finding two of the bank clerks standing outside upon the steps and the doors not yet opened.

"What is the meaning of this?" he inquired, glancing from one to the other.

"It means that young Heatherton has not yet put in an appearance, and we cannot get in!" Mr. Cummings remarked, and now looking exceedingly anxious.

"That's queer! I never knew him to be late before. He was here on Saturday, and apparently well," said Mr. Butler.

"Yes, and he said he was going to Nantasket—haven't you seen him, Mr. Butler?" Cummings inquired, in a startled tone.

"I?—No. I have just come up from Nantasket myself; but I saw nothing of him on the boat. I hurried up, however, for I knew Mr. Cranston was to start this morning for his vacation, and would want to leave the keys with me."

A blank look settled over the faces of the other two gentlemen, at this remark, while a chill of apprehension ran down the back of Mr. Cummings.

For Ned to be absent at that hour in the morning, with the keys to untold treasure in his possession—for of course he must have them since he had not delivered them to Mr. Butler—had a very bad look, and instantly his mind reverted to the terrible denouement which had attended his return from Albany.

Could it be that the young man was a scamp after all; that he had committed the robbery, cunningly covering his tracks, and then wormed himself back into the confidence of the bank officials, only to betray it again at the first favorable opportunity?

"You haven't seen the boy at all?" demanded Mr. Cummings of Mr. Butler.

"I haven't laid my eyes upon him."

"But Mr. Cranston sent the keys to you by him, as he was unexpectedly obliged to leave for the White Mountains Saturday afternoon—one of his children was very ill, I believe."

"Good heavens! Then something dreadful must

have happened to Heatherton!" cried Mr. Butler, with a white face, staggering back against the wall.

"Yes, or—to the bank."

"Are you sure he went to Nantasket?"

"No, but he said he was going on the two o'clock boat," Mr. Cummings returned, adding, with a stern compression of his lips: "However, we must not stand here doing nothing; we must manage some way to get inside the bank and make sure that all is safe within. Ah! here comes Mr. Johnson, and he has a duplicate key," he concluded, as another employee of the bank at that moment joined them.

The situation was explained to him, whereupon the door was speedily unlocked and the four anxious men hurried inside the bank, only to find their worst fears confirmed.

The greatest confusion prevailed everywhere.

Instead of the order and nicety in which everything had been left less than forty-eight hours previous, papers and books were strewn in every direction.

Drawers and desks had been examined and ransacked, and the safe stood open, with its money-drawers emptied of their contents.

The door to the vault was swung aside, while every package of bills, every roll of coin, besides all available checks, had disappeared.

A most gigantic and wholesale robbery had been committed, for the usual quarterly payments had come in on the previous Saturday, and a larger amount than usual had been retained in the bank, consequently the robbers had made a rich haul.

But the discovery was a terrible shock to the four men, and, as they realized the astounding truth, they stood looking into each other's ghastly faces, speechless and benumbed with terror.

Of course the mind of every one turned with suspicion to missing Ned.

"We must get on the track of that boy at once," Mr. Butler remarked, with white lips and in a shaking voice, as soon as he could control himself sufficiently to speak.

"Send for an officer or a detective without a moment's delay," supplemented Mr. Cummings with considerable excitement.

An officer was accordingly sent for; messengers also were dispatched to summon the other officials of the bank, and a telegram inquiring for Ned was forwarded to Mr. Lawson's cottage at Nantasket.

A reply from Mrs. Heatherton was received somewhat later, stating that Mr. Lawson was in New York and that Ned had not been in Nantasket at all.

This message created the utmost consternation among the employees of the bank.

"The young rogue must have committed the robbery on Saturday night and left immediately for parts unknown!" Mr. Butler excitedly exclaimed, upon hearing the telegram read. "He has had a fine start, too. I always thought he had a remarkably old head on his young shoulders, and if my advice had been taken he would have been severely dealt with after that Albany affair."

"Don't be too hard on the boy," said the more kind-hearted Mr. Cummings; "he may have been made the

victim of others, and is in no way responsible for this dire state of things. Who knows but what some professional cracksmen got an inkling that he had been intrusted with the keys, and had even made away with him in order to get possession of them?"

"Nonsense, Cummings!" was the irritated retort; but the man stood up boldly for the youth, who had been faithful in the performance of his duties.

"You are not charitable enough, Mr. Butler," he said. "If it was your own boy whose good name was at stake, I imagine that you would look at the matter in a different light."

But of course everything pointed to Ned as the one mainly responsible, for, since the keys had been delivered to him, it was evident that the robbery could not have been committed if they had not, by some means been obtained from him.

Noon brought Mrs. Heatherton, pale and trembling, to make inquiries regarding her dear boy, and anxious to learn the meaning of the message which she had received and answered earlier in the day.

It was apparent to every one that she had not the remotest idea where Ned was, nor what had prevented his going to Nantasket on Saturday, as he had promised to do.

She answered all questions put to her frankly and without hesitation; explaining how Mr. Lawson had been suddenly called away, and that he would return from New York that evening; while she seemed so unnerved and distressed about Ned's mysterious disappearance, that a feeling of deepest pity thrilled every

heart, and there was not a man present who did not shrink from telling her the suspicions which rested upon him.

Mr. Cummings was finally obliged to explain that Ned had had the keys to the vault and safes, besides the one opening the bank, and that a great robbery had been committed.

Poor Miriam sank almost fainting upon a chair at this dreadful intelligence.

"Oh! but Ned is guiltless of any wrong," she gasped, with ashen lips. "He would not touch a penny that did not belong to him; for, ever since he was a little child, he has said that he would become a man of whom I should be proud. Oh!" starting wildly to her feet, as a terrible fear flashed upon her, "why—why did you give him the keys to all that treasure? Some one must have learned the fact, and—great Heaven!—I believe they have murdered my boy for the sake of your gold!"

This awful fear was too much for the fond mother's strength, and, happily for her, unconsciousness temporarily relieved her agony of mind.

The kind-hearted Mr. Cummings had her borne to the nearest hotel, where she was given in charge of the matron, to be cared for until Mr. Lawson returned.

He arrived on Tuesday morning, and, as a messenger was on the lookout for him at the Providence station, he was at once notified of what had occurred.

He, of course, was greatly unnerved by the revelation, and went directly to Mrs. Heatherton.

He found her in a state of forced composure, but so pale and sad that he was nearly moved to tears.

She insisted that Ned had been murdered, and seemed utterly hopeless that he would ever return to them.

Mr. Lawson said they would not return to Nantasket, but go directly to Mount Vernon street, where they would remain until some tidings were received.

Accordingly, he telegraphed to the servants to shut up the cottage and return immediately to Boston; then procuring a carriage, they drove directly to their city home.

But upon arriving at the house, their consternation and grief were augmented a hundred-fold by the discovery that the dwelling had also been entered and robbed.

All the silver of any value had been taken away, besides many costly articles of bric-a-brac, while the safe in the library had been blown open and rifled of everything of value it contained.

CHAPTER XIII.

MIRIAM HEATHERTON ASSERTS HERSELF.

The discovery of this other robbery, and the mysterious absence of the young man, whom he loved as if he had been his own son, with the terrible circumstances attending it, and following so closely upon the death of his sister, proved too much for Mr. Lawson's failing constitution; and the next morning when the breakfast bell rang, he did not respond to it promptly, as was his custom.

A servant was sent to his room to call him, but receiving no answer to her rap upon the door the girl ventured to look within, whereupon she turned and ran shrieking to Mrs. Heatherton that "Mr. Lawson was in a fit."

The "fit" proved to be a serious stroke of paralysis, and a physician was instantly summoned; but though every effort was made to save the man, he had no strength to rally from it, and died that afternoon.

Poor Miriam felt as if the last link which bound her to life was severed, when the final struggle was over, and she saw the physician close the eyes of him who had been so true a friend to herself and Ned.

Mr. Lawson had evidently realized that his end was near, for once, when he came to himself for a few moments during that memorable day, he turned to Miriam, who had not left his side after his condition was discovered, and murmured with difficulty, in an inquiring tone:

"Ned?"

"He has not come," Mrs. Heatherton returned, in a low, hopeless tone.

A look of pain leaped into the eyes of the dying man.

"The dear boy is innocent," he faltered through his drawn lips—"soul of honor."

Then after a moment he added, with even greater difficulty.

"Will—private drawer—safe. Ned is—to have—all."

These were his last words, and it was greatly to be regretted that no one heard them save Miriam herself,

as she chanced to be alone in the room with him just at that moment. In less than three hours he was dead.

Who can describe the sorrow and suffering of the next few days?

They were like a horrible nightmare to that delicate, heartbroken woman, who had been so sadly bereft, and afterward she often wondered how she had ever lived through them.

The last sad rites were performed over Mr. Lawson with no one to mourn him save the pale, sad woman who had been such a comfort to the lonely old man, and a sunbeam in his home during the last few years of his life—unless we except Thomas Heatherton, Benjamin Lawson's sister's husband, who had been notified of the death of his brother-in-law, and had come on from New York to attend the funeral, and for other purposes, which will appear later.

When Mr. Lawson's physician introduced Miriam Heatherton to her proud father-in-law, the man for a moment had appeared somewhat disconcerted at the unexpected encounter; then quickly recovering himself, he bestowed a cold nod upon her, and from that moment until after Mr. Lawson was borne out of his home, utterly ignored her presence in the house, except when it was absolutely necessary to consult her upon certain arrangements regarding the services.

When all was over Mr. Heatherton constituted himself the executor of Mr. Lawson's affairs, and demanded of Miriam the keys to his safe.

"As my wife was Mr. Lawson's nearest relative and legal heir, her death makes me her successor, and it de-

volves upon me to settle his estate," he remarked, in a pompous, overbearing tone.

Miriam flushed, and wondered what the man would say when he should find the will of which Mr. Lawson had told her.

But she quietly replied.

"The safe is not locked, sir; it was forced and robbed only a night or two previous to Mr. Lawson's death—during his absence in New York."

"Ha!" sharply exclaimed Mr. Heatherton, while he suspiciously searched the woman's face; "did the thieves get much?"

"I cannot say, not knowing what the safe contained," was the brief reply, though Miriam flushed, for the clergyman had returned from Mount Hope with them at Mr. Heatherton's request, and she was wounded at being treated so superciliously in his presence.

"Hum!" and a frown darkened his brow. "Probably the rogues were after money only, and doubtless we shall find his private papers untouched. I will examine its contents at once; and will you, Mr. Hall," turning to the clergyman, "kindly remain as a witness while I do so?"

"Had Mr. Lawson no legal adviser?" the gentleman inquired of Miriam, before replying to Mr. Heatherton.

"I think he was in the habit of attending to his own business affairs, as he was a lawyer himself," she replied. She was upon the point of adding that Mr. Lawson had told her he had made a will; but checked herself, thinking that the fact would be revealed when the gentlemen examined the contents of the safe.

Mr. Hall consented to assist Mr. Heatherton in his

duty, and the two men at once repaired to the library, where they were closeted during the remainder of the day.

The hours which followed were long and anxious ones to Miriam, and she found herself dreading to meet Mr. Heatherton again, fearing his anger when he should learn that Mr. Lawson had made Ned his heir.

But there was a greater trial in store for her, and one which she had not anticipated.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Hall, having been released by Mr. Heatherton, came to take leave of her, and spoke very kindly and sympathetically regarding her great affliction.

"Try to keep up your courage, Mrs. Heatherton," he said, as he clasped her hand in friendly farewell; "I cannot believe that any real harm has befallen your son, although he may be forcibly detained until the real rogues can get well away. If I can be of any service to you, at any time, I beg that you will call upon me."

"You are very kind," Miriam murmured, tremulously.

"You must let me know your address when you get settled, and my wife shall come to call upon you," the clergyman continued, her pale, sad face, appealing more forcibly than the wildest manifestation of grief could have done to his kind heart.

"My address—when I get settled?" she repeated, in a faltering tone, and with a startled look.

"Yes," her companion explained. "Mr. Heatherton thinks it will be advisable to dismiss the servants and close the house, until he can dispose of it to advantage."

"Close this—Mr. Lawson's house?" questioned Miriam, putting her hand to her head with a puzzled air, as if she did not comprehend, though the shock which went through her nearly deprived her of all her strength.

"Yes, that is what Mr. Heatherton said. By the way, is he not a relative of yours?—you bear the same name," said Mr. Hall, regarding her curiously.

"He is the father of the man whom I married," the wretched woman replied, with pale lips.

But she was wondering what it could mean—this closing of the house.

Mr. Lawson had told her there was a will in the safe—that Ned was to have all his property. Those had been his last words, while he had distinctly stated, during that conversation with her before his departure for New York, that he had made his will six months previous, and, saving a few bequests, Ned was to have his entire fortune.

Knowing this, she had felt sure that Mr. Heatherton would find the will and that, though Ned should never be heard from again, she, as his heir, would at least have a comfortable home for the future.

But Mr. Hall's words indicated that no will had been found; that Mr. Heatherton intended to take charge of Mr. Lawson's property, and she would thus again be thrown out homeless and alone upon the world.

The thought was torture to her.

To be obliged to leave this lovely home, and all the dear familiar objects, by which she had been so long surrounded, drift back, perhaps, into poverty-stricken

lodgings, such as she had occupied when Mr. Lawson had first found her!—how could she bear it?

Then her occupation and its remuneration would be taken from her, and with the burden of anguish and suspense which she was suffering, it seemed as if she could not do battle for herself again out in the rough world.

Truly, it was "hard lines!" for the delicate and sensitive woman.

"Your husband's father!" the clergyman exclaimed, after an astonished pause, during which Miriam's mind had been occupied with these troubled thoughts.

But he suddenly checked himself, as it flashed upon him that there was some mystery surrounding these two lives regarding which he must not appear to be too curious.

"Yes," Miriam briefly and coldly replied.

"He is dead, Mr. Heatherton tells me," Mr. Hall continued, and wondered at the peculiar look which shone for a moment in his companion's eyes.

Miriam was astonished at his words, for they told her that Thomas Heatherton was utterly ignorant of his son's return.

She opened her lips as if to speak, and was upon the point of asserting that Richard Heatherton was still living, but she changed her mind and held her peace.

"If he had been living," her companion resumed, "he would have inherited this property, through his mother, who, as I suppose you know, was Mr. Lawson's sister, but as he is not, you are entitled to a wife's dower, and, if I am not mistaken, to even greater rights, through your son, who, of course, would be his father's heir."

Miriam looked up eagerly, for what he told her had given a new turn to her thoughts.

"There was no will then?" she began.

"No, there was no will, no memoranda even, among his many papers, to give a clew to Mr. Lawson's wishes regarding the disposition of his property. The safe contained certificates representing a great deal of bank stock, government bonds, deeds of property in various localities of the city, and some mortgages. I did not dream, Mrs. Heatherton, that you were the wife of Mr. Thomas Heatherton's son; but, since you are, it is only right for you to know that a portion, at least, of Mr. Lawson's property belongs to you," Mr. Hall concluded, and feeling certain that a deep mystery connected with her marriage enshrouded the beautiful woman's life.

"It seems very strange," Miriam murmured, musingly, her thoughts going back again to what Mr. Lawson had told her regarding the will.

"Strange!" repeated her companion, regarding her curiously. "No, I think not; it all seems very plain to me. But I must leave you now," he added, again clasping her hand. "Take care of your health, Mrs. Heatherton; you do not appear to be very strong; and command me at any time if you should need me."

"No will!" exclaimed Miriam, in a wondering tone, as the door closed after her companion. "Then it has been stolen! and"—with a sudden start—"I believe that Richard Heatherton is the thief! He needed money—he must have known that the house was vacant, and so entered and robbed it of whatever he could turn into money, finding the will during his rummaging, and

taking it, in the hope, perhaps, that its loss would not be discovered. Mr. Lawson never would have told me that he made a will unless he had done so. It seems, too, as if he must have had some presentiment of impending evil or he would not have confided in me to such an extent as he did the night of his departure for New York.

"And Mr. Heatherton evidently does not know that his son is still alive," she went on, after a few moments of thought. "It is obvious that he expects to monopolize everything, and intends to turn me out in the cold, if possible; but Mr. Hall's timely hint has given me some new ideas. Shall I act upon them? What ought I to do? Shall I submit to the haughty man's supercilious and overbearing meanness, or shall I assert myself and my rights?"

She sat a long time pondering these questions, but at last she lifted her bowed head with a resolute air, while a look of determination gleamed in her usually gentle eyes.

"While I fear the worst for my dear boy," she murmured, and her face was also convulsed with agony at the thought, "there is a possibility that he still lives; that he will some time come back to me; and, for his sake as well as for my own, I will battle for our mutual rights.

"If I did not know," she went on gravely, "that Mr. Lawson wished Ned to have this property, if I believed I was acting contrary to his wishes, I would not lift my hand in the matter; but he distinctly stated that Richard Heatherton should never have a dollar of his fortune, and I am sure that he really wished Ned and

me to have the benefit of it. Even though I may not be able to secure, in the absence of the will, what he desired, since he owned so much property, there will, doubtless, be considerable allowed us by the law. I will read up on this 'right of dower' question before I take any decided stand and see what can be done."

She waited until she heard Mr. Heatherton go up to his room, then she slipped into the library, and, after a diligent search among Mr. Lawson's law books, found a work relating to the questions which so deeply concerned her.

Taking the book to her chamber, she read long into the night on the rights and privileges of a wife as regards her husband's property; and, before day dawned, her mind was thoroughly made up as to the course which she would pursue.

During the breakfast-hour—for Miriam did not neglect any of her duties as housekeeper, and served her guest to the best the house afforded, with a dignified courtesy and grace which did not fail to impress him—Mr. Heatherton pompously remarked, as he passed his cup to be filled the second time:

"Madam"—he never deigned to address her by her name—"as I shall be obliged to return to New York within a few days, I have decided to dismiss the servants and close the house; therefore you will oblige me by hastening any preparations which you may have to make for your own departure."

Miriam's white hands trembled slightly as she poured the rich cream into his cup, but she deliberately finished preparing his coffee and passed it to him before she attempted to make any reply to his remark.

Then, lifting her clear eyes to his face, she responded, with apparently the utmost self-possession:

"I do not think it will be necessary or wise to close the house, Mr. Heatherton; indeed, I prefer not to do so, as there is a great deal of value here which needs looking after. It is my intention to remain quietly here and await what developments the future may hold regarding the fate of my son."

Her companion almost dropped the cup he was in the act of raising to his lips, in his astonishment at this unlooked-for reply to his by no means gentle hint that she would be expected to vacate the premises.

He set it down untasted and stared at her in undisguised amazement.

"Madam," he began, more pompously than before. "I—I don't think I understand you."

"I simply stated my intention of remaining here in Mr. Lawson's house, for the present," Miriam repeated, feeling her courage rise, now that she had once committed herself.

"And I say that the house is to be closed—at least until I can find a purchaser for it," said Mr. Heatherton, flushing an angry crimson at thus having his will opposed.

"No, sir; the house will not be closed and it cannot be sold at present," was the quiet response.

"I should like to know what you have to say about the matter!" her companion exclaimed, with increasing excitement.

"I have something to say about it, as you ought to know, Mr. Heatherton, if you are at all acquainted with

the law," said Miriam, growing more and more determined and clear-headed every moment.

"You have not," the man thundered. "My wife was Benjamin Lawson's only sister and heir, and I as her nearest kin can lawfully claim every dollar of his property, since he left no will."

"You forget that your son would be joint heir with you and that his wife and child have certain rights and privileges."

"I have no son; he has been dead for years," cried Thomas Heatherton, but his voice trembled slightly over the words.

"Can you prove that he is dead?" quietly asked Miriam.

"Of course I can prove it; his death is recorded in the book of the ship in which he sailed for Australia more than twenty years ago," retorted Mr. Heatherton, with triumphant assurance.

"I do not propose to contest that point with you," said Miriam, calmly; she saw that he was still ignorant of the truth and she did not care to break it to him. "If Mr. Lawson left no will I presume that you have, as you say, some claim upon his property; but as Richard Heatherton's wife, I claim for myself a wife's dowry and for my son whatever the law will allow him as his right, therefore, I intend to remain where I am until these questions can be settled."

CHAPTER XIV.

"ZOUNDS! WHAT A SPIRIT THAT WOMAN HAS!"

Mr. Heatherton grew alarmingly red in the face

over Miriam's cool determination. He was terribly angry, and was rendered absolutely speechless by the dauntless spirit she exhibited. He had realized, in a vague sort of way, upon being introduced to her, that this fair, sweet woman was she whom his son had wronged in his youthful days, and who had recently claimed to be his legal wife. Still, he had never been willing to recognize her as such, consequently he had not once thought of her rights and Ned's in connection with questions regarding property, and now he was both appalled and excessively irritated in view of the trouble she was liable to make for him in opposing his efforts to control Mr. Lawson's fortune.

He found his voice, however, after a few moments, and shortly resumed the verbal conflict :

"I do not acknowledge your claim, nor any relationship with you."

Miriam bowed courteously, as in seeming deference to his view of the matter; then replied, in the same quiet, lady-like tones she had adopted from the first :

"I know that you do not, sir! nevertheless, the fact remains. I have, as you also know, the proofs in my possession, and can produce them at any moment if required to do so. You are a business man, and you cannot fail to be aware of the fact that a wife has certain legal rights; that if her husband possesses property she is entitled to a share of it, and no real estate can be disposed of without her sanction and signature. Richard Heatherton, your son, ruined my life when it was at its brightest. The wrong he did me drove me from my home and friends—made me an outcast—and for years I struggled with poverty and hardships, in the effort to

rear the child of my supposed shame. I never, from the moment of his heartless desertion, knew real comfort until my boy was fourteen years of age, when Mr. Lawson found us and brought us here to his home, where he has been as kind as a father to us. I know," and here Miriam Heatherton's clear blue eyes looked straight into the face of her father-in-law, carrying conviction in their dauntless gaze, "that he intended to provide handsomely for our future, for he told me so only an hour before he left for New York last week; but since no will can be found, of course I cannot prove this. However, I intend to make the most of what rights are mine, that his wishes in this respect may be carried out as far as possible, and I do not propose to be turned homeless into the streets of Boston. With all due respect for you and your claims, Mr. Heatherton, I repeat—I intend to remain where I am for the present. Shall I fill your cup again?"

"No," was the brief and uncourteous reply, for the man was too amazed and nonplused by the pluck of the little lady opposite him, to be able to say more just then.

"Then if you will kindly excuse me," Miriam remarked, as she arose from the table, "I will give the cook her orders for the day."

She was moving toward the door, with the easy, graceful carriage of the perfect lady that she was, when Mr. Heatherton recovered himself sufficiently to say:

"Look here, madam, if you please."

Miriam stopped, turned, and stood quietly waiting for what further remarks he might wish to make.

"It costs something to keep up such an establish-

ment as this," he blurted out, coarsely. "Who do you expect is going to foot the bills?"

"I shall be careful to make no unnecessary expense," she quietly returned, "but the place, and all it contains, needs care to prevent it from deteriorating in value. With the aid of one servant, whose wages I will myself defray, I can attend to everything. Of course the taxes, insurance, and necessary repairs will have to be charged to the estate until it is settled by the courts."

The man flushed angrily again.

He had not been prepared to have the tables turned upon him like this, and had he not been instinctively ashamed to do so, he would have sworn roundly, to relieve himself of his wrath.

"I shall see a lawyer to-day about this matter," he sullenly muttered.

"Very well, sir; if the law decrees that I shall not remain here, I shall of course be obliged to submit to its power," was the unruffled rejoinder. "Can I do anything more for you?"

Without deigning her any reply, Mr. Heatherton impatiently arose from the table and abruptly left the room, while Miriam went to her own apartment, and there gave vent to her over-charged feelings in a flood of tears.

She was so supremely wretched, so filled with agony and suspense over Ned's uncertain fate, so lonely without dear, kind Mr. Lawson, to whom she had become deeply attached, in spite of his many eccentricities, while the future appeared so unsettled and forlorn, that life seemed scarcely worth the living.

For herself, she would have preferred to give up

the battle and relinquish all right and title to the property of her old friend to Mr. Heatherton; but, while there was any hope of Ned coming back, she was determined to maintain her position and secure all that she could.

The law might decide against her, but she would at least make an effort to carry out, as far as she could, what she knew to be Mr. Lawson's wish.

She firmly believed that Richard Heatherton had entered the house, broken open the safe, and stolen the will, which had given his coveted heritage to another, and she was convinced that she should yet have to fight him, as well as his father. Doubtless they would unite their forces and make common cause against her; but she would do her best for Ned, in case he should come back; if he did not, she felt that she must die of a broken heart, and then to her it would matter little who had Benjamin Lawson's property.

While she lay upon her bed, brooding thus over her many trials, she imagined she heard the door bell ring, but she was too wretched to give the matter more than a passing thought, and, as no one came to call her, she lapsed again into her sorrowful musings.

About an hour later a servant sought her with a message from Mr. Heatherton.

"Would she have the kindness to come to him in the library, to confer upon a matter of business?"

Somewhat surprised at the courtesy of the request, she arose, bathed her flushed face, and slipped into a fresh, dainty white wrapper, then went below to ascertain for what she was wanted.

When Thomas Heatherton angrily left the dining-

room, after his spirited interview with Miriam, he went directly to the library, where he also fell into troubled musing.

He had never been more surprised in his life than when his son's widow—as he supposed—coolly informed him that Benjamin Lawson's house could not be closed, as he directed, and that she intended to remain there indefinitely.

He had imagined her a timid, yielding little body, who would not dare to raise her voice against him, and whom he could browbeat into obedience to his lightest command.

But, instead, he found her as resolute and tenacious of her rights as himself, and he began to fear that he should have serious trouble with her in the settlement of the property.

"She's a cool one, a decidedly plucky little body, too, and —— well bred, for a farmer's daughter," he muttered, as he recalled her courteous manner, her lady-like tones, and the clear, direct gaze of her beautiful eyes. "Blest, if she isn't downright pretty besides, and gets herself up in right dainty shape with those cool white dresses and delicate ribbons. Rachel herself never showed better taste;" and for a moment a shade of sadness fell over his face at the remembrance of his dead wife.

Just then the door bell rang, and presently the servant put her head into the library, remarking:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"Show him in," Mr. Heatherton commanded; and the next moment the long-parted son and father stood face to face.

After one long, startled, amazed look into that countenance, upon which he had not gazed for over twenty years, Thomas Heatherton staggered back and sank into the chair, from which he had risen to greet his caller, exclaiming, hoarsely:

"Great Heaven! is it you, Richard Heatherton, or your ghost?"

"There are no ghosts, father, and it is really your reprobate son who stands before you," the younger man coolly replied, as he helped himself to a chair and sat down opposite his unnerved companion.

But for once in his life Thomas Heatherton utterly lost his balance. He trembled and shook so with nervous excitement that he could not for the time utter a word; his face was also deathly pale, and he wore a very dejected appearance.

"Well, mon pere, you do not seem to be very glad to see your long lost son," the newcomer remarked, with a short, sharp laugh, accompanied by an ill-concealed sneer.

"You—you have taken me very much by surprise, Richard," said Mr. Heatherton, feebly. "I had believed you to be dead for many years, and, of course, I was astonished at your unexpected appearance. What does it all mean?"

Richard Heatherton, who, for reasons best known to himself, thought it best to conciliate his offended parent, related, in a friendly way, what had befallen him during his long absence from his native land, after which they had a long conference regarding Mr. Lawson's death and the easiest way to possess themselves of his large property.

It was after this conference that the message was sent to Miriam requesting her presence in the library.

She had not a suspicion of the ordeal awaiting her, and when she opened the door and found herself in the presence of her recreant husband, the shock she experienced can be readily imagined.

A vivid scarlet swept up to her brow, then receded, leaving her very pale; but, calling all her will to her aid, she braced herself for the trying interview.

She did not deign to recognize Richard Heatherton, by so much as a look after that one first brief glance, and the man felt the intentional slight more than he would have been willing to acknowledge, for never in her youthful days, had she seemed so beautiful as now in the ripeness and maturity of her perfect womanhood.

"You wished to see me, I believe," she remarked, addressing the elder gentleman with a directness and composure which somewhat disconcerted him also.

"Yes; be seated, if you please," he returned, motioning her to a chair.

"Thank you," Miriam responded with a quiet politeness, "but I will listen to you here," and she laid her hand upon the back of a chair near her, thus indicating her determination not to sit in their presence.

"I—I told you this morning that my son was not living," Mr. Heatherton resumed, flushing in spite of his natural arrogance, beneath her steady gaze, "but he has appeared very unexpectedly to me; and—and it seems from his account that you knew of his existence."

He paused a moment, as if waiting for some reply, but Miriam simply acknowledged the truth of his observations by a cold bow, and he continued:

"This denouement changes somewhat the aspect of affairs concerning which we conversed this morning, and I—ah—that is, my son thought we might, perhaps—um—that we might come to some mutual agreement regarding the disposition of the property of my late brother-in-law."

Again he waited a moment, as if hoping that she would help him out by some question or remark, but as she continued to observe him with a calm look of inquiry, he plunged at once to the point he had in view.

"We thought that possibly you might be willing, for—for a handsome consideration, and to avoid long and perplexing litigation, to—to sign away your right of dowry."

He lifted his eyes questioningly to her to ascertain how she would receive this proposition, but not a muscle of the fair face moved to betray her feelings on the subject.

It was evident that she intended they should show their whole hand before she committed herself in any way.

The man frowned, but he could not force her to speak until she was ready; and though he was greatly irritated by her composure and persistent silence, he was obliged to go on.

"We have, therefore, concluded," he said, "to offer you a sum of ten thousand dollars if you will renounce your right of dower, provided that you will also agree never to—to claim any further connection with—with the family. I—I trust, madam, that you will acknowledge the advisability of such an arrangement, both for yourself and us."

"Come, come, Miriam—be reasonable, and accede to the terms my father has proposed; it will be for your interest to do so, for you would stand no chance in a fight against us," Richard Heatherton here interposed, in a would-be conciliatory tone.

The woman's white lips quivered slightly at the sound of his voice, but by no other sign did she betray that she heard a word uttered.

She bent her head in thought a moment when he ceased speaking, then she lifted her eyes again to the face of the elder man.

"I understand that you wish me to sign away all right and title to Mr. Lawson's property, or any other upon which I may have a legal claim?" she remarked.

"Yes, that is our desire, and you will thus secure a snug little fortune for yourself without any trouble or expense," the man replied.

"And if I refuse?" she quietly inquired.

"Then," his brows contracting sternly, a look of anger leaping to his eyes, "we shall be obliged to contest to the bitter end any claim that you may make."

Miriam Heatherton straightened her slender figure, with an air of conscious strength, while a slight smile of scorn curled her red lips.

"Do you think to frighten me into yielding to your will by such a threat?" she asked, her clear, sweet tones ringing musically through the room. "You cannot do it. I shall sign no papers for you; I shall not relinquish one iota of my claim as a legal wife; I shall never hide myself from the world, or pledge myself to obscurity to gratify your arrogant pride. Shall I tell you why?" and with this question she wheeled suddenly about and

faced the faithless man whom she had once so madly worshiped, while her blazing eyes seemed to penetrate to the very depths of his soul.

"Because," she went on, with a deliberate emphasis which seemed to beat every separate word into the brain of her listeners, "the whole of Mr. Lawson's fortune belongs by every legal right to my son, if he is living—to me, or perhaps I should say to his parents—as his heirs, if he is dead."

She caught her breath, and her voice faltered over the cruel word; but recovering herself she resumed:

"For Mr. Lawson himself told me just as he was leaving for New York last week, that he had made a will some six months ago, bequeathing all he possessed, save a few legacies, to my boy. On the day he died he repeated the same to me, and informed me that the will would be found in yonder safe."

She lifted one slender finger and pointed toward it as she said this, but with her piercing glance still riveted upon Richard Heatherton's face.

Instantly and involuntarily his eyes sank beneath hers, while for his life, he could not wholly repress the start which her words sent through him.

Miriam was quick to note it, and her heart gave a great bound of conviction.

"He is the thief!" she said to herself, "he is the burglar who entered this house and forced the safe! I will hunt him down—I will not spare him; I will sign no papers for either of them."

"Your statements are very absurd, madam," remarked the elder gentleman, with a sneer, for to do him justice, he did not believe a word of her assertion,

since, in the presence of Mr. Lawson's clergyman, he had examined every document belonging to the dead man, and found no will, and greatly to his surprise, for, in view of the ill-will which had existed between them for so many years, he had confidently expected to find that he had left the bulk of his property to some charitable institution, as he had threatened to do in his hot anger at Richard's misbehavior so long ago.

"They may sound so to you, but they are true, nevertheless," Miriam firmly responded.

"But there was no will found among Mr. Lawson's papers."

"It has been stolen," was the brief reply.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I have not acted in good faith, in the examination of the papers belonging to my brother-in-law?" hotly demanded Mr. Heather-ton.

"Not at all, sir," said Miriam, calmly, "for I am confident that the examination was honorably conducted. The will was probably stolen at the time the safe was blown open and rifled of whatever of value it contained."

"And upon the strength of what you assert Mr. Lawson told you, do you propose to lay claim to the whole of his fortune?" demanded her interlocutor.

"Not exactly," Miriam answered, "but I shall at least make provision for my own future to such an extent as I may."

"You are extremely obdurate, but I think that the law will convince you that you have not quite so much power as you imagine," angrily retorted the baffled

man, while in his heart his respect for the indomitable pluck of the woman increased a hundred fold.

"You can call the law to your aid if you choose, Mr. Heatherton," she resolutely returned; "I shall be ready to meet you with your own weapons at any time."

An angry oath broke from Richard Heatherton at this.

He had not dreamed that they would meet such determined opposition to their plans.

During the interview with his father, previous to Miriam's appearance, they had arranged everything satisfactorily to their own minds, and imagined that they could easily induce her to accede to whatever terms they might choose to offer.

But they now learned that the apparently frail little woman possessed a spirit and determination that could not be easily overcome. She had them in her power and knew it, and meant to use it to the utmost.

Mr. Heatherton, in his pulse-proud arrogance, could not endure the thought of having the facts of his son's early marriage, with all its disgraceful circumstances, aired before the public, as it would of necessity be, if they were driven to a lawsuit; while, on the other hand, Benjamin Lawson's fortune was a fat plum worth struggling for, and he did not mean to yield it, if by any possible means he could secure it.

As for Richard Heatherton, he was no less anxious to avoid all publicity in the settlement of his uncle's affairs, on account of Vera, for he believed it would be almost a death-blow to his idolized child if she should discover the stigma that rested upon her birth. Yet he was in great need of money, and if he could but get pos-

session of the handsome property Mr. Lawson had left, he would then quit the country again, and thus Vera need never learn the truth.

He had been taken wholly by surprise by what Miriam had stated regarding a will, for when he had seen her previous to her departure for Nantasket, she had appeared to have no thought of reaping any pecuniary benefit from the man who had befriended her, and in his heart he cursed him for having told her of it.

"Isn't ten thousand enough? What will you take to sign off?" he demanded, in a sullen tone.

She turned and regarded him thoughtfully for a moment, then with tense lips and waning color she answered briefly :

"When the mystery of my son's disappearance is explained, I will answer you."

"Madam, you are incorrigible! Your obstinacy is intolerable!" Thomas Heatherton burst forth, his face crimson with passion.

"My son is the rightful heir to his uncle's property and you have no business to hamper his just claims in this way."

"Mr. Heatherton, I am a woman who, for more than twenty years had to struggle against the tide, and was almost crushed by the burden of a great wrong," Miriam responded, in a low, grave tone. "I am alone and friendless, my heart is nearly broken with grief and suspense over the terrible charges against my son and the mystery of his fate; but I, too, have rights, and I have no intention of being bribed to resign them. If your son is the legal heir to Mr. Lawson's property, then I, as his legal wife, am entitled to a befitting sup-

port from the estate—at least, I shall claim such, without relinquishing anything, until I learn the truth regarding my boy.”

With a slight bow to the gentleman, as she concluded, she turned and quietly left the room, without waiting to note the effect of her words.

“Zounds! what a spirit that woman has! She’ll never give in, Dick,” cried the older man, with a note akin to admiration in his voice.

“She shall!” his son hoarsely returned, and white to his lips. “Oh, heavens! why couldn’t I have known the truth regarding that miserable marriage? It could have been annulled, and then my child, my Vera, would have been saved from a terrible blight.”

CHAPTER XV.

GERTRUDE’S FAITH IN HER LOVER.

It has been stated, in a previous chapter, that Mr. and Mrs. Landmaid were booked for a trip to Europe, and were to leave on that very Saturday when so much was happening to our hero.

Gertrude and a friend, Mrs. Page, with whom she was to spend the summer, were to accompany them to New York on Friday night, see them start on their voyage, and then proceed to Halifax going up the Hudson River to Albany, then to Niagara, down Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence, and thence to their destination.

But these plans were all changed by a sudden and alarming attack which Mrs. Langmaid had during Thursday night. It proved to be very brief, how-

ever, and she was very much better in the morning, but the physician ordered the voyage to be postponed, at least for a few days, to enable her to regain something of her strength. Thus it happened that the whole family were in Boston when, on Monday, the evening newspapers announced in the most sensational manner, the robbery of the —— Bank, and the suspicions regarding Ned's agency in the bold crime, together with the fact of his mysterious disappearance.

All this came upon Gertrude Langmaid like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, when the evening paper was thrown at the door, and she was the first to open it and read the appalling headlines.

She stood rooted to the spot, reading on and on, as if fascinated by the horrible tale, and feeling as if the blow must kill her.

Her heart almost ceased to beat; a feeling of suffocation oppressed her, her ears rang, and a terrible numbness rendered her temporarily powerless.

Then a feeling of deep wrath superseded every other emotion.

"Ned accused of such a dreadful crime!" she cried, with blazing eyes. "Ned a thief—a midnight burglar! Never! Papa," springing toward Mr. Langmaid, who at that moment entered the room, "what is this horrible rumor? What does it mean?"

She held the paper out to him as she spoke, and her hand trembled so that it rattled in her grasp.

The man's face clouded.

"My darling, I did not mean that you should see it," he said, regretfully; "I intended to destroy every paper until you were well away from Boston. But, Gertrude,

I am afraid that it is something far more serious than a mere rumor."

"What! do you believe it, papa?" the young girl sharply demanded.

"I am obliged to confess that matters look rather bad for young Heatherton," he reluctantly admitted.

Gertrude drew herself up to her full height, her slender figure straight as an arrow, her head proudly poised, her eyes almost aflame from the intensity of her emotions.

"Papa, you never can believe that Ned could commit such a crime; that he could be so false to truth, honor, and every principle of right!"

"I am afraid I must," her father sadly replied. "The first time he went wrong I gave him the benefit of the doubt; but ——"

"The first time he went wrong!" Gertrude interposed, with pale lips, while her thoughts reverted instantly to what Bill Bunting had told her only a few days previous. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Langmaid flushed. He had spoken thoughtlessly, forgetting entirely, in his grief and anger over Ned's supposed recent rascality, for he was a heavy loser by the plunder of the bank, that Gertrude had been kept in ignorance of the Albany affair, and even now he hesitated to wound her more deeply by revealing the truth regarding the treachery and worthlessness of her lover.

It had been a terrible blow to him when he had read, on his way home from his place of business, the startling announcement of the bold robbery of the —— Bank.

He had always liked Ned; had believed him to be a noble young man in every respect, and hoped that he was going to make the darling of his heart a kind and worthy husband.

When he had learned of that first robbery his sympathies had all been with Ned; and he believed, with Mr. Lawson, that he had been made the victim of a bold and dastardly plot.

But now, after reading an account of what had occurred during the last forty-eight hours, his faith in the young man was sadly shaken, and the suspicion that he was in some guilty way mixed up in the affair had taken possession of him.

"Tell me what you mean, papa; I will know," Gertrude persisted, with resolute firmness, as he did not answer her, and he saw that it would be useless to try to keep the truth from her; accordingly he told her the whole story. She listened in silence, not once interrupting him during the recital.

But when he concluded, she said quietly, but positively:

"I do not believe one word of it. I have the utmost confidence in Ned, and nothing but his own confession of guilt shall ever make me distrust him. That man must have drugged him on the way from Albany, for I am sure that he would never appropriate a penny which did not belong to him. And, papa, perhaps you will think me imaginative, but something forces the conviction upon me that the same man is also at the bottom of this dreadful affair."

"It is very kind and charitable of you, Gertrude, and natural, also, I suppose, for you to wish to shield him,"

Mr. Langmaid gravely returned; "but to me and others it looks very much as if Ned was an accomplice——"

"I do not believe it—I will not believe it; it is only a plot to ruin him," the young girl burst forth passionately.

"I know that it must be very hard for you to accept the fact of his guilt, my dear," her father gently returned; "but no one could have plotted to ruin him in this way without having first learned that he had been entrusted with those precious keys, and no one could have known that fact without being told."

"Oh, papa, you are cruel to doubt Ned," Gertrude cried, vehemently. "I know that he would not do a dishonest thing—he is truth and honor itself, and I will have faith in him though all the world believe him false."

"Gertrude, this is all folly," her father returned, sternly, "and you must cease from this moment to regard him as anything to you. He will doubtless be arrested and brought to justice, and our name must not be associated in any way with that of a criminal."

Gertrude flushed a vivid crimson at these severe words, then every atom of color slowly faded from her face.

She did not reply for a moment or two, but stood with bent head and clasped hands, as if thoughtfully pondering some question of vital importance.

At length she raised her face, and looked her father sadly, but steadily in the eye.

"I—I do not wish to do anything to grieve or displease you, papa," she said, tremulously, "but I love Ned with my whole heart. If he should be arrested

and proven guilty of this terrible crime, it would kill me. But," with an air of resolution, and a gleam of holy devotion in her lovely eyes, "until he is, I will not doubt him; I shall be true to him—I shall stand bravely by him until the end."

Mr. Langmaid looked deeply troubled, and a flush of anger swept over his face, for he well knew that Gertrude inherited his own strong will, as previous experience had proven.

He seldom crossed her directly, but when he did, he always meant to carry his point.

"This is beyond all reason," he said, impatiently, "and I positively forbid you to regard yourself as in any way bound to him, from this time forth. I will not have our name connected with any such disgraceful affair. Do you hear?"

"Yes, papa."

"Will you obey me?"

There was a moment of hesitation; then the beautiful girl said firmly, but with downcast eyes and trembling lips:

"I cannot, papa. I gave myself unreservedly to Ned, and I must be as true to him, 'for better or for worse,' as if I had already promised before the altar. I will never believe he is guilty until he is proven so beyond dispute."

Mr. Langmaid could not help but admiring this noble loyalty to her lover, while at the same time he was irritated by her obstinacy.

"This is simply the most absurd folly, Gertrude," he sternly rejoined, "and I will not allow you to live up to it. If you make yourself conspicuous in the

affair, you will incur my severest displeasure. I hope you understand me."

He did not give her an opportunity to reply, but abruptly left the room, closing the door in no gentle manner, while Gertrude sank upon the floor, bowed her face upon a chair and burst into a passion of tears.

But despite the fact the girl had been so tenderly reared, she possessed a strong character, which only needed something to draw it out and test it.

She did not allow herself to spend much time in useless weeping and weak repining. There were other things besides her own regrets and sorrow to be considered, and her thoughts flew at once to the unhappy mother of her lover.

"Poor Mrs. Heatherton," she murmured, in a sympathetic tone, "she must be nearly heart-broken. How can she bear it? I must go to her and tell her that I believe in Ned, even though all the world is against him."

She secretly resolved that she would go to Mount Vernon street early the next morning, and try to comfort the sorrowing woman. But when morning came, the poor girl, who had not closed her eyes during the whole night, because of her anxiety regarding her lover, was too ill to rise. She had a high fever and was exceedingly nervous, almost verging upon hysterics.

Mr. Langmaid was alarmed and called the family physician, who said she was not seriously ill, but needed perfect quiet for a few days.

She was not able to leave her bed until Friday, when she called for the daily papers, but her father had taken care that none should be found in the house, for he

had no intention of allowing her mind to be harrowed by reading the sensational versions of the bank robbery, and the numerous conjectures regarding young Heatherton's continued absence.

But Gertrude was determined to know the worst, and about eleven o'clock she informed her mother that she thought she would feel better for a drive.

The horses were accordingly ordered, and the fair girl drove directly to a news-stand, where she obtained the papers she wished, and eagerly devoured all that she could find relating to the matter which so deeply concerned her.

It was while thus engaged that she learned of Mr. Lawson's sudden death, and of his burial the previous day.

She was terribly shocked, and with a heart full of sympathy for Mrs. Heatherton, she ordered the coachman to drive her directly to Mount Vernon street.

"Yes, Mrs. Heatherton is at home," the servant said, in answer to her inquiry for that lady, "but I doubt if she is able to see any one."

"I am sure she will see me, Nellie," Gertrude said, with a wan smile that went to the girl's heart, for she had shrewdly suspected how matters stood between her and Ned. "Let me go directly up to her room; I must see her, Nellie; indeed, I must."

So she was allowed to enter, and a moment later she was tapping lightly upon the door of Miriam's room.

"Come in," called a tearful voice, and Gertrude passed in and found the unhappy woman nearly prostrated after her trying interview with Richard Heather-

ton and his father, for she had but just come from the library.

The fair girl was beside her in an instant, her arms around her, and with the brown head pillowed upon her breast.

"Dear Mrs. Heatherton," she sobbed, tears raining over her cheeks, "don't give up; don't lose courage; Ned will come back—I am sure he will; then everything will be explained, and his name cleared from all suspicion. Oh! do not be so disheartened," she continued, as the overwrought woman wept afresh at this evidence of sympathy and faith. "I know that he is innocent—he could not be guilty of a crime like that, and I shall never lose faith in him."

Miriam drew the girl close to her heart, and kissed her fondly.

"You are a precious comforter," she sobbed, finding it a blessed relief to give way to the tears which had been so long pent up. "I, too, am sure that Ned is not guilty—that he is only the victim of some terrible plot; but the suspense regarding his fate, together with all this sensation, and the loss of our best friend, had driven me nearly frantic. It was kind of you, dear, to come to me in this dark hour. Oh Gertrude! what do you suppose has become of the dear boy?"

Gertrude's fair face paled at this question. The least of her own fears was that he had been dishonest.

She knew that he could not do a mean or unworthy act. But his fate!—the thought of that appalled her. The fear that some desperate person had waylaid and, perhaps, murdered him, to get possession of the keys he held, made her heart faint within her, and chilled her

blood with dread. The two heavy-hearted women talked long of their mutual trouble, and while they could not allay the fears of each other, they were strengthened to bear it by the exchange of confidence and sympathy, during which Gertrude whispered the secret of her own and Ned's love and hopes for the future.

She remained for a couple of hours, then returned to Arlington street, not only believing in her lover more firmly than ever, but strengthened in her determination to stand by him to the end, in spite of the opinions of the world and her father's commands.

The next day she returned with Mrs. Page to Halifax, and the following Wednesday Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid sailed for Europe.

CHAPTER XVI.

“WHILE THERE'S LIFE THERE'S HOPE.”

Richard Heatherton and his father at once set about the settlement of Mr. Lawson's property.

The former proved his identity and legal claim as next of kin, and filed a petition to be appointed as executor of the estate.

The two men came to the conclusion that it would be useless, as well as very unwise, to try to turn Miriam out of her home; accordingly they decided to allow her to remain, and everything to go on the same as during Mr. Lawson's life, for the present.

Mr. Lawson had left considerable real estate, and Richard Heatherton knew enough of law to understand

that if the court should grant his petition, he could never dispose of any real estate without the signature of his wife, therefore he wisely concluded to bide his time, hoping to induce her later on by either bribery or strategy to accede to his plans.

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But let us ascertain what was happening to Ned during all this time.

We left him just as he lost consciousness, in one of the staterooms of Mr. Gould's yacht, where he slept heavily and profoundly as those who after long suffering are quited and subdued by morphine.

It was perhaps nearly an hour later that the door to his stateroom was cautiously opened, and a face peered in upon the unconscious man.

It was that of the villain who had lured Ned to the yacht, and a look of fiendish triumph swept over his features as he saw that his victim was helpless and at his mercy.

He entered, shutting the door behind him, then with dexterous hands and rapid movements he went through Ned's pockets, but abstracting nothing until he found the precious keys for which he was searching.

A gleam of exultation lighted his eyes as he transferred them to his own pocket.

"Aha!" he chuckled, "now I shall have things all my own way. If this isn't the easiest climb to fortune a man ever had, I am much mistaken."

Then he stood for a few moments looking thoughtfully down upon the prostrate form of his victim.

"You are a fine fellow," he muttered. "I'm blest if you aren't, and it seems almost a pity to ruin your life

like this. I can't help it though—money I must and will have at any cost. I will not harm a hair of your head," he continued, with an involuntary shiver; "you shall simply be my prisoner until I can land you safe in another country, then I'll try to get you a good position, and set you on your legs again."

He stood a moment earnestly regarding Ned, noticing his fine proportions, his well-shaped head, intellectual brow, and handsome face, then turning away, he went softly out of the room, locking the door after him.

This occurred, it will be remembered, on Saturday afternoon.

After leaving Ned, Gould went immediately on deck, where he called the sailor who had rowed him and the young man to the yacht, ordered him to lower the boat, and a few moments later they were making rapidly for the wharf again.

As Gould stepped upon the rude stairs, he remarked in a low tone to his companion :

"You will be waiting here exactly at midnight tomorrow, and will remain perfectly quiet until you see me light a cigar and make the usual signal."

"Ay, ay, sir!" the sailor responded; then as Gould leaped upon the stairs and walked rapidly uptown, he re-entered the boat, and rowed back to the yacht.

The next night, a little past midnight, two men stealthily approached Rowe's Wharf from different directions.

Each bore a good-sized satchel, but when they met neither spoke, simply walking with swift, noiseless

steps to the point where Gould had landed the evening previous.

Arriving there one of them lighted a cigar and whirled in a circle three times.

The signal was almost immediately answered by a sound, like the chirp of a bird, from the water just below where they stood.

The cigar was instantly extinguished, then the men made their way quietly down to the water's edge, and stepped into the boat that was waiting for them there.

"Now get out of this quick," was the low-spoken command of one of them; then the boat shot out from the wharf, and ere long its occupants were climbing the stairs to the deck of the *Bald Eagle*.

They disappeared with all possible speed down the companionway leading to the cabin, bearing their satchels with them, but after a short time returned without them, after which they repaired again to the boat, and were rowed back to the shore, where they slipped quietly away by different routes into the town.

We already know what occurred the next morning when it was discovered that the —— Bank had been robbed of a large amount of treasure—what excitement reigned when it was ascertained that young Heather-ton had disappeared, leaving not the slightest clew by which he might be traced, while strong indignation and consternation prevailed among the stockholders and bank officials, who felt almost crushed by the enormity of their loss.

But the man Gould appeared as usual upon the street, going and coming about his ordinary pursuits with the most independent and unconscious air, betraying

much interest in the newspaper accounts of the "bold and daring crime," and discussing it as freely as any one.

Consequently no suspicion attached itself to him, although he was in the very heart of the excitement, and so the wonder and speculations regarding the real criminal went on.

Meantime poor Ned was heavily sleeping off the effects of the powerful drug which had been administered to him.

When he began to come to himself the first thing that attracted his attention was the fact that the yacht was speeding through the waters at a rapid rate.

He realized this but vaguely at first—it seemed more like a dream than a reality; there was a strange numbness and stiffness throughout his body, and his head felt heavy and unnatural, as if it belonged to some one else, while a terrible nausea began to make itself manifest.

He lay moaning and tossing in his berth for a long time, too utterly wretched, physically, to make any effort to collect his thoughts, but finally outraged nature made an exertion to restore herself; after which, though weak and exhausted, his mind became clearer, and he began to think.

The result of this, however, was a state of great mental distress, which far exceeded all that he had endured physically, until he was almost ready to pray that he might die.

He made a feeble effort to examine his pockets, and found as he feared that the precious keys were gone.

A groan of agony burst from him, and he felt as if life henceforth would be an unendurable burden.

Finally he slept again—this time naturally and restfully, and when he next awoke, he felt both strengthened and refreshed.

He was surprised to find that some one had entered his room during these hours of slumber, and left a tray containing a tempting repast upon a chair by his side.

There was an appetizing steak, boiled eggs, hot and cold bread, and a cup of strong coffee.

He was both faint and hungry from his long fast, and sitting up drew the tray toward him eager to appease his hunger.

But he suddenly paused in the act of raising the coffee to his lips.

“How do I know but that this is also drugged like the other?” he muttered, quickly putting down the cup. “But,” he reasoned, after a moment, “the eggs, at least, cannot have been tampered with, and the bread, having been cut from a loaf, is doubtless free from any drug.”

So he ventured to eat the eggs and bread, and drank a glass of water from his own pitcher.

While this simple repast did not satisfy the craving of his appetite, he felt stronger for it, and was forced to be content.

Then he lay down in his berth again, and tried to calmly consider his situation.

A glance from his state-room window told him that he was out upon the broad ocean, while the rapid motion of the vessel convinced him that she was under a high pressure of steam.

This fact of itself convinced him that the bank had

been robbed, while he believed that the treasure had been brought aboard the yacht, and was being borne to some place where the villain who had committed the crime would feel secure in the enjoyment of his ill-gotten gains.

These thoughts drove him nearly wild, and yet, at the same time a thrill of hope crept into his heart.

He did not stop to ask himself what his own fate was to be; it was enough to know that he was alive and restored to consciousness; that he had not been poisoned, as he believed, when he felt his senses leaving him, and that horrible benumbing sensation creeping through every nerve and fibre of his body.

His whole mind was now concentrated on one idea—if the bank's treasure was on board the *Bald Eagle*, could he not manage, by some means, to secure and restore it to his employers?

While he had life there was surely hope; and this thought renewed his strength and courage.

He sat up again, a flush of excitement creeping into his pallid cheek, and began to critically examine his state-room.

It was like any other state-room, but very nicely finished and handsomely furnished with every comfort and convenience that could be desired by any one upon a voyage of pleasure.

But hark! What was that sound?

Ned paused in his examinations and listened.

His ears had not deceived him, for now he heard it again.

It was a groan, followed by an exclamation of angry impatience.

It proceeded from the other side of the partition, which doubtless divided his state-room from another.

"Can it be that there is another prisoner on board this vessel?" Ned murmured, with a sudden heart-thrill. "Can that man have been practicing his nefarious schemes upon others? If such is the case—if he has cajoled some one else into the same villainous trap that he set for me, we might establish communication with each other and plan some way to escape."

The thought sent an indomitable courage and energy thrilling through his veins.

He stooped and looked underneath his berth, and his face brightened instantly, for at the head of it he saw a broad panel let into the casing.

"If I could succeed in removing this casing," he muttered, "the panel would slip out, and a very little trouble would enable me to obtain an entrance to the other state-room."

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth his knife.

But his face fell as he looked at the broadest blade, for he knew it would not be strong enough for the work he contemplated.

Then his eye fell upon the knife which lay upon the tray that contained his breakfast.

It was heavy and strong, and he believed that he could make it serve his purpose.

He seized it, and, creeping beneath his berth, immediately but cautiously began his work.

He labored steadily for an hour with both the table-knife and his own, which was the sharper of the two, and was useful in cutting, when suddenly a touch upon

the handle of the state-room door told him that some one was about to enter.

He had just time to slip quietly into his berth and cover himself with a blanket when a sailor stole into the room, glanced inquiringly at the occupant of the berth, and, believing him to be asleep, quietly took up the tray, without observing that the knife was missing, and noiselessly departed, shutting and relocking the door after him.

This was hardly done before Ned was once more out of his berth and at his work underneath it.

He was very industrious, cutting and prying without regard for the costly woodwork which he was mutilating.

He made some noise, too, but he felt sure that it could not be heard by any of the crew above the creaking of the vessel and the movements of the machinery.

One thing struck him as strange—the utter silence which prevailed in the room adjoining his! He had not heard a sound since that one exclamation of angry impatience.

Finally he succeeded in removing three sides of the casing to the panel.

A little more perseverance and he would have an opening.

But it was hard work; his arm ached, and he was frequently forced to rest on account of the cramped position he was obliged to assume in his close quarters.

But after half an hour he went at it again, and the last side of the casing was at length removed.

Running the stout blade of the breakfast knife beneath the panel, Ned pried at it with all his strength.

It yielded a little; just enough to show him daylight in the adjoining room, and to convince him also that it was firmly nailed to a framework there, corresponding to that which he had labored so assiduously to remove.

This discovery told him that it would require more strength than he possessed, to detach the panel from its place, and with a sigh of discouragement he threw down his tools and wondered what he should do next.

CHAPTER XVII.

NED MAKES A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

Ned leaned back upon his elbow to rest, his eyes fixed wistfully upon the unyielding board, and fell into a brown study.

But suddenly he was astonished to see the panel move inward, as if pressed by some one on the other side of the partition.

Then the toe of a boot was thrust into the aperture to hold it, while some one demanded in authoritative but subdued tones:

"Who are you in there, and what in thunder are you about?"

Ned's heart bounded into his throat at these questions, but bending his face down to the opening, he answered:

"I have been trapped aboard this yacht, drugged, and robbed. Who are you?"

"Aha!" was the eager and exultant rejoinder. Then the same voice continued, "Well, then, I'm another vic-

time of one of the most devilish scamps that walks the earth. But, hold on a bit and I'll tell you more. I'll just brace myself and push on this side of the panel with my feet, while you pull on that, and we will soon be able to converse without any trouble."

Ned needed no second bidding. He seized the panel with both hands, and exerting all his strength, in less than two minutes he held the board in his hands, while he peered through the opening with curious eyes at his neighbor.

He was a man perhaps fifty years of age, with an intelligent face, a massive head and brow, keen, dark eyes, and a firm, resolute mouth, with iron-gray hair and beard.

"Oh! so you're a young fellow," the stranger remarked, after an earnest inspection of Ned's countenance.

"Yes, sir; and if, as you say, you are also a prisoner on board this vessel, I can safely make a confident of you," Ned responded, thinking it would be policy to be perfectly frank at the outset of their acquaintance.

"I think you may," was the brief reply.

"Well, then, I am—or was—an employee in a Boston bank," Ned began, "I was intrusted by the cashier with the keys to the safe and vaults, to be given to his assistant, who was to take his place during his vacation. I also had the key to the outer door of the bank, and while I was on my way to deliver them, I was lured on board this yacht, drugged, robbed, and locked within this state-room. That was on Saturday. What day is this? I am sure I have no idea how long I have slept."

"This is Monday," answered his companion, who had not once taken his eyes from the young man's face.

"Monday!" exclaimed Ned, with a quick, indrawn breath. "Then of course that wretch has completed his diabolical work, as I suspected."

"Doubtelss; but tell me all about it," said the stranger; and Ned related all that had occurred, from the time he left the bank on Saturday noon, up to the hour when he lost consciousness of everything.

"Yes, of course, the bank has been robbed, and that explains the steps and muffled voices which I heard late last night, or very early this morning," said the man, thoughtfully. "There must have been two men, or more, and I think I know who they are. Gould and Bunting, and they are two of the biggest rascals I know of——"

"Bunting!" interposed Ned, growing deadly pale.

"Yes; they have been in company for a long time, and I am sure they were the men whom I heard last night. They came down to the state-room next to mine, where they remained for perhaps twenty minutes or half an hour, then went away again. My name, young man, is William Hunting——"

"William Hunting!" again exclaimed Ned, amazed, then checking himself, he remarked apologetically, "but pray excuse me and go on."

"Fifteen years ago I lost my wife and three children by diphtheria, and the terrible bereavement broke my heart and spirit," the man resumed. "From the hour that I laid them away, I shut myself from the world—became, virtually, a recluse, and gave myself

up to the perfecting of an invention which had long been taking form in my mind. It was a pump for exhausting the air from all kinds of receptacles, and was, when completed, the most perfect and efficient thing of its kind ever produced. My home was near Oakland, California. I lived quietly, peacefully, and alone, in my small cottage, a mile or so from the city. One day, a little more than a year ago, a severe storm arose, and in the midst of it a young man knocked at my door, and asked for shelter until the gale should subside. I could not refuse him, although I was not pleased to have my seclusion thus invaded. I gave him some books with which to amuse himself, and then resumed work upon my machine, which occupied every moment of my time. But my visitor soon tired of his books, and betrayed a great interest in my employment. He approached my table, where he stood quietly looking on a while, then ventured a remark or two which showed intelligent observation of my invention, and a love for mechanics.

"This won upon me and drew me out, and I explained the nature of the machine to him, and remarked, during our talk, that if I only had money enough to get it patented and introduced to the public, my fortune would be made. The man made no reply to this, and when the storm was over he took his departure, after heartily thanking me for having given him shelter. Three days later he reappeared, accompanied by another man whom he introduced as Mr. Gould, a gentleman who was deeply interested in all new inventions, and who, having plenty of means, would be glad to help me introduce the machine if I

wished, and he could be assured that it was all I claimed. This at once fired my enthusiasm, and I was only too eager to explain my work to him, for it was very nearly perfected, and only needed money to push it, and to make it a grand success. Mr. Gould became absorbed in it, acknowledged its value, and proposed that I should bring the pump East, since he thought it would find a better market in Boston, to begin with, than elsewhere.

"He promised to advance the funds necessary to introduce it, for a certain amount of the stock. I agreed to his proposition, but stipulated that a patent should first be applied for in my name. This was legally done and the patent was granted. When our arrangements were all completed, the man asked me if I would be willing to make the trip in his yacht, saying that he owned such a vessel, and was himself going East in that way. I was only too glad to accept this invitation, for I detest railway travel, and am very fond of the sea; accordingly, we immediately left California, taking my precious invention along with us. The other man, Bunting, made the trip by rail. That was the first of last October; and, my young friend, I have never stepped my foot on shore since that time."

"Can that be possible!" exclaimed Ned, greatly astonished.

"It is the truth," said Mr. Hunting, with a sigh. "I was most kindly and courteously treated during our voyage; indeed, to such an extent, that Gould won my confidence, and I talked with so much freedom with him regarding my invention, which seemed to have a peculiar fascination to him, until he understood it

nearly as well as I myself understand it, and we laid many plans regarding its introduction to the public. But, one morning after we had sighted Boston harbor, I awoke to find myself a prisoner in this state-room. I was amazed, dumbfounded. In vain I demanded the meaning of such an outrage, and insisted upon an interview with Gould to obtain an explanation. The reply to all such demands was that Mr. Gould was not on board, although I frequently heard his voice, and knew that he repeatedly came and went. After a delay of about a week the yacht put out to sea again, and sailed to a warmer climate, where she went into port for the winter; but even then I was not allowed to leave the vessel, although most of the crew were discharged, one Herculean sailor and the steward alone being retained to take care of the yacht and look after me. It was a dreary winter, as you can readily imagine, but spring finally opened, the yacht was ordered here again, and here we have remained until now, with the exception of a few pleasure trips which Gould has made."

"And haven't you seen Gould during all this time?" Ned inquired.

"Twice only; and then he came to try to make me sign some papers renouncing my claim to my invention, and giving him the entire control of it. He said that he would give me ten thousand dollars for my signature, the money to be paid in installments as its success would warrant. This I utterly refused to do and the last time he left me in a towering rage, muttering the most terrible threats against me. I will never sign any paper for him," the man went on, with a dogged fierce-

ness. "He may kill me, if he will, but he shall never enrich himself at my expense."

"If he should take your life that would give him the supreme control of the machine, would it not?" Ned asked.

A peculiar smile flitted over the face of his companion.

"It would, but for one reason," he grimly returned. "There is one simple little point about it which I have never confided to any one, and no one can make a success of it without understanding it—it regulates the speed of the thing. I have told him this, and that is why, I suppose, I have not been made food for fishes long before this. If I die, my secret dies with me."

"That is clever," Ned said, admiringly, "but I am more astonished than I can express by what you have told me," and then he related what he already knew regarding the invention, and how people with whom he was already acquainted had come very near being swindled out of their money by Bill Bunting who had adopted the name of William Hunting, and represented that the pump was the invention and bequest of a half-brother who had recently died.

"I have been made the victim of a base plot from the very beginning," said Mr. Hunting; "but Gould may keep me here until the 'crack o' doom;' he shall never learn my secret."

"I should hope not; but since you and I have managed to establish communication with each other, can we not also manage, by strategy, and by uniting our forces, to find a way of escape from this yacht?" Ned thoughtfully asked.

"I am sure I do not know how," responded his companion, gloomily. "I am as ignorant of the construction and management of sea-going vessels as a child, and even if we could manage to release ourselves from these state-rooms, there would be other and insurmountable difficulties to overcome."

"I know all about a yacht," Ned remarked; "but of course we two could not sail one of this size, even if there was no crew to oppose us, and probably they outnumber us four to one. Besides, I have no more idea than the man in the moon where we are; we may be out in mid-ocean making for some foreign country for aught I know."

Ned dropped his head upon his breast and fell into troubled musing.

The situation seemed a desperate one indeed.

But he was young and full of courage, and ready to venture everything to secure his liberty.

Presently he resumed:

"If we could only come into port somewhere, or at least drop anchor near some port, I believe we could manage it."

"How?" eagerly questioned his companion.

"Well, in the first place, tell me, are you a strong, able-bodied man?" Ned asked, bending toward the hole in the partition for a look at his fellow prisoner.

"I have nerves of iron and muscles of steel," was the brief but significant response.

"Good! Well, then my plan would be this. One of the sailors comes to feed us three times every day—at least I suppose so."

"Yes."

"If we were at anchor, or in port, we could both get into the same room through this hole, and when the man came to bring us food, we could easily overpower, gag, and bind him, and conceal him under the berth——"

"But he would be missed," interposed Mr. Hunting.

"True; but the natural inference would be that he had gone ashore, without leave, for a lark. We could attack him at night, and his disappearance at that time would give that impression. This would, of course, enable us to get out into the cabin, and, after all was quiet for the night, we might reconnoiter to get some idea regarding the arrangement of the yacht, although I know the lay of the land pretty well already. Not more than one man would be needed to watch on deck if we were in port, and after the rest of the sailors had turned in we could steal forth and lock them in their rooms; it would be easy enough then to overpower the watch, and the vessel would be in our hands."

"It all sounds very well as you have planned it, my young friend, but it will be a very hazardous undertaking, and I doubt if it succeeds," Mr. Hunting remarked, dejectedly. "Then if we should fail, the result would in all probability be fatal to us, for these sailors are a reckless set, and would not hesitate to send us to 'Davy Jones' locker' without a word of warning, rather than risk peril to themselves."

"Yes, I know that there will be great risk in the plan," Ned said, gravely; "but, sir, I am desperate, for I feel that I have not only my life, but, what is far dearer, my honor, at stake. Twice the bank has suf-

ferred loss through me. The first time the officials gave me the benefit of the doubt; but of course they must believe now, since I have disappeared with so much treasure, that I am criminally concerned in the vile scheme. I believe that this man Gould has had his eye upon me for a long time. I believe that he has been connected with both robberies, and I have an idea that the booty—at least of this last venture—is all concealed on board of this yacht.”

“I should not wonder!” said his companion, with a start, “for there were certainly two men in the state-room next to mine last night, and they moved about in a stealthy way, as if they were up to some deviltry.”

“Well, Mr. Hunting, I intend to make a desperate fight, if you will help me, for my freedom and the restoration of what has been stolen from the bank,” Ned replied, with a resolute air. “I can never go back to Boston; I can never face any one whom I have known”—and a deep flush of shame suffused his face as he thought of Gertrude and her friends—“while this terrible stigma rests upon me; while life itself will be comparatively worthless to me if I have to live a fugitive and an alien all my days.”

“I can understand your feeling,” the man returned, while he studied the manly, perplexed face before him with deep interest, “and I will do my best to help you back to freedom and honor. I cannot help fearing, however, that we shall fail——”

“If we fail, it will be because I shall fight it out to the death!” Ned interposed, with a passionate earnestness which told that he was, indeed, in deadly earnest,

while the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcords.

"I admire your spirit, young man," Mr. Hunting returned, heartily, "and I will stand by you till the last grip."

"Thank you," Ned gratefully returned; then added: "And now let us try to make ourselves as comfortable and contented as circumstances will allow, until we anchor in some port, which I am sure we shall sooner or later."

"But it may be they are taking us to some foreign country," said Mr. Hunting, with a look of anxiety on his face, "and if such is the case, we shall find it very difficult to carry out our plan."

Ned looked grave for a moment. Then he remarked:

"You said, I believe, that the men who came so late last night left the vessel again."

"Yes, I am very sure they did; for, soon after they went up on deck, I heard the splash of oars as if a boat were being rowed to land."

"Then," said Ned, looking relieved, "I do not believe that the yacht is on her way to any foreign port; Gould would never trust all that treasure on such a voyage unless he was with it. My opinion is that the vessel has been ordered to some convenient point, where it will remain until he can arrange his plans to join it. Meantime we must arrange our plans so that we can improve the first opportunity. If we can only get the control of this vessel when we arrive in some harbor, I will notify the proper authorities of my suspicions, have the boat officially detained until I can telegraph

to the cashier of our bank to send some one to our aid, and to search the yacht and identify their property."

"That is well thought of," his companion returned; "and now as to ways and means. If we succeed in overpowering our man, or whoever we attack, where are we going to get ropes to bind him?"

Ned's eyes went roving about the room in search of something to utilize for that purpose, and finally rested upon the sheet that was dangling from his berth.

"We must strip up our bedclothes and make them into cords," he at length remarked.

"Yes, we might do that," said Mr. Hunting, "but do not forget that meantime the steward comes to change the sheets—he may discover that they have been tampered with."

"That is so," said Ned, reflectively, then suddenly brightening, inquired: "Is the upper berth in your room made up?"

"Yes."

"Well, so is mine, and we can strip them both of the under sheets, which will be sufficient for our purpose, and after making them up again nicely, I do not believe the man will suspect anything. Suppose we go at it at once, and it will serve to occupy our minds and pass the time," said Ned, energetically.

"Agreed," replied his companion, adding: "Your courage is something wonderful, my friend, and I am sure you deserve to succeed."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BOLD VENTURE.

The two men began their operations immediately.

They tore the sheets into strips, and then twisted them into stout cords, after which they made them into flat coils and concealed them about their persons.

While thus employed the time did not drag quite so heavily, while it was also a great comfort to both to have the companionship of each other.

Mr. Hunting was naturally a very quite and retiring man, but he had been a great student in a scientific way, and when he could find any one who would listen to his hobbies, he could talk as fluently as any one.

Ned began to grow quite fond of him after a day or two, while Mr. Hunting found more and more to admire in the strong and noble character of his young companion.

But there were times, as the vessel sailed on, when Ned's restive spirit could ill brook the terrible suspense, and he would grow almost frantic with anxiety and doubt as to his fate.

His mind dwelt almost constantly upon the great crime which he was confident had been committed, and he wondered what the result had been to the bank; whether the institution had been obliged to suspend payment; whether many poor people, who had worked hard to save their money, would have to lose their precious earnings. He wondered just what the officials thought of him; if they really believed him capable of

committing such a stupendous crime, and of betraying their trust in such a villainous manner, and he would shiver and cringe; his proud soul would grow faint and sick within him, as he thought of the sensational announcements which he knew must have gone over the whole country in the newspapers, and his name thus made a byword for sneering multitudes.

"Oh! how can I bear to live, if this wrong is never righted?" he cried out again and again, as he lived these experiences over and over, and paced the narrow limits of his state-room like a wild beast in its cage. "It must be righted. God surely will not suffer me to drag such a clog after me all my days. I am sure that treasure is on board this vessel, and—I will save it or die in the attempt!"

Sometimes his agony of mind would be almost insupportable, when he thought of his mother, and wondered how she had borne his mysterious disappearance; how she had received the news of his supposed crime, what Mr. Lawson had thought of him, and whether he would still have faith in him, as before in the Albany affair, in spite of the strong evidence against him.

He felt as if he was living years instead of hours, and there were times when he felt as if he must lose his reason, unless the terrible strain and suspense were soon cut short. But all things have an end; and one morning Ned awoke, astonished and rejoiced, to find that the yacht was lying at rest upon the ocean, her sails furled, her engine and machinery quiet.

He arose and hurriedly dressed himself, and upon looking from his state-room window, his heart bounded with sudden joy as he described all about him the ship-

ping of a harbor, and not far away the spires and chimneys of a large city.

"Mr. Hunting," he cried in eager, but subdued tones, "are you awake?"

"Yes," came the reply, but in a rather drowsy tone.

"Do you know that we are at anchor near some large city?"

"No!" and the man instantly sprang out of bed with a bound.

Turning to his window he saw that they were indeed near some large port, though of course he had no more idea than Ned regarding its name or locality.

The two men were greatly cheered and encouraged, although they both felt that a few hours might bring them very critical experiences, if not danger and death.

When the sailor who attended them brought Ned his breakfast, the young man asked him what port they had entered.

The man looked at him in silence a moment, as if debating in his mind whether it was best to answer him or not, then briefly responded:

"Halifax."

A thrill of delight ran through Ned's nerves at the name.

They were still in his own country, or at least among English-speaking people, and his spirits grew strong within him.

"Halifax!" he repeated, with another heart-bound, while a flush mounted to his brow, "and Gertrude is here! Shall I succeed in regaining my freedom? Shall I see her within a few hours, and will she believe me when I tell her of my wonderful experience?"

His heart must have assured him that his dear one would have all faith in him, for a tender smile curved his lips and a fond light beamed in his eyes.

He crept again to the hole beneath his birth, and communicated the glad tidings to his friend, and while they ate their morning meal, they arranged their plan of action, in case the slightest opportunity of escape should offer itself.

"We must make a bold move this very night," Ned observed, with a firm setting of the lines about his mouth. "It is my opinion that the yacht has been ordered to wait here until the owner can join it, then, in all probability, he intends to escape to another country with his booty, and live at his ease."

"I believe that you are right," Mr. Hunting returned, "and it stands us in hand to act with all possible promptness—at the first opportunity we may as well make a bold stroke for freedom."

"I wish we knew how many men we shall have to contend with," Ned thoughtfully remarked, "I saw only four the day I came on board; but of course it takes more than that number to sail a vessel of this size. I believe I will try to pump Nicholas, when he brings our dinner, and see what I can get out of him."

Accordingly when the man came at noon, Ned approached him in a genial, affable way.

"I say, Nicholas," he began, "sit down and chat with a fellow for a few minutes, can't you? I tell you it is no fun being shut up here day after day with no one to speak a friendly word to you."

"Can't, sir; my orders is to serve yer an' keep mum," laconically responded the sailor.

"Well, of course, you'd have to keep mum upon certain subjects," Ned said, in a matter of fact tone; "but at least you can tell me something about the boat and your duties. I'm wonderfully fond of yachting myself, only, of course"—with a slight smile—"I don't exactly relish taking my pleasure in this way. This is a fine vessel, though."

"Indeed she is, sir," answered the man, with a satisfied look and drawn out in spite of himself by Ned's praise of the dainty craft. "She's a beauty, an' no mistake, as trig as can be, an' rides the water like a bird."

"Yes. I see she's a fast sailer, and she must have cost a round sum. Been aboard her long?" Ned inquired.

"No, only 'bout three months, or a leetle more; one of the old hands died, and I took his place."

"Um—how many hands does it require to sail her?"

"Eight, sir, besides the steward."

"Nine men against two," was Ned's inward comment, and for a moment his heart almost failed him. But he remarked, with a smile and apparent carelessness:

"And a pretty soft snap, too, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; except when we make long voyages, then we have to stan' 'ound purty sharp."

"'Long voyages,' " replied Ned, trying hard to conceal the intense interest he felt regarding his point; "what do you mean by that?"

"Well, sir, I've never made a special long voyage on this 'ere craft; but they do say she came from Californy last fall, an'—an' "—letting his voice fall as if fearful

of being overheard—"we're waitin' for the boss now to make the trip to t'other side of the pond."

"To Europe?" Ned questioned, with his heart in his mouth.

"Ay, ay, sir; but I've no business tellin' you the affairs of my boss," the man said, flushing guilty.

"What's the harm, since I suppose I've got to go along, too, and nobody can be the wiser for it, while I'm shut up here?" Ned said, confidentially. "When do you expect Mr. Gould?"

"Can't say, sir; I heard the mate say he'd telegraph the captain the time he'd arrived in Halifax. But this won't do for me, sir; I must be off to my work, for me and the firstmate are goin' ashore on a leetle lark to-night," and the man, having really thawed out, gave Ned a sly wink as he turned to leave the room.

Again Ned's heart leaped into his throat, for this arrangement would materially reduce the force to be contended against.

But he gave a little laugh, and remarked:

"A lark, eh? Are you allowed to be gone all night?"

"No, sir; we've got to be on board again some time afore mornin'; but I reckon it'll be purty nigh daylight," and with another wink the man went out, locking the door carefully after him.

Ned's face was very pale and grave as he crept under his berth, and called to Mr. Hunting.

"We've got to take our fate in our hands to-night," he said, as his friend's face appeared at the aperture.

"So soon?" the man exclaimed, in a startled tone.

"Yes, for we may not soon have another opportu-

nity," Ned replied, and then related the conversation just recorded.

They conversed a long time and with great earnestness, mapping out their plan of action with exceeding care; then schooled themselves to wait, with what patience they could command, until darkness should settle down on land and sea.

Ned, watching from his window, saw the mate and Nicholas row away from the yacht, in one of the boats a little before the supper hour, and to his great joy he saw a third man with them.

Then he called to Hunting to join him in his state-room, which he did, entering through the aperture under the berth. Then they arranged their ropes and gag in readiness for their victim, and about five minutes before it was time for their supper to be served, Mr. Hunting stationed himself behind the door, ready for action.

He was a powerfully built man, and Ned, as he marked his attitude, and the stern, resolute lines about his mouth, felt assured that he would not fail to do his part in the coming trial.

They had not long to wait, for steps and the clatter of dishes were soon heard approaching Ned's door—for his meals were always served first.

The key was turned, the door opened back against Mr. Hunting, and a strange face appeared in view.

"'Ere's your supper, sir," gruffly said the newcomer, a great burly fellow, nearly as large as two of Ned.

"Thank you," courteously returned the young man, who was apparently engaged in writing by the side of his berth, "just set the tray down, please, and I'll be

ready for it presently," and he motioned toward a stool which stood near him.

The man went forward, unsuspecting of any trap, deposited the tray on the stool, and was about to trace his steps when Hunting, who had noiselessly closed the door behind him, sprang upon him and dealt him a stunning blow directly behind the ear.

It was very deftly done.

The man swayed dizzily for an instant, staggered, but before he could recover himself in the least degree Ned was upon him, his strong, lithe hands around his throat to prevent any call for help, while another blow from Mr. Hunting's fist completed the work so well begun, and the two men eased their victim to the floor, where he lay limp and still, entirely at their mercy.

It was a comparatively easy matter then to bind and gag him, which they did most effectually, and then lifted him into the berth and covered him with a blanket.

Then the two confederates, pale and somewhat unnerved from excitement, sat down and quietly waited further developments, and an opportunity to go on with their work.

They expected as the moments went by, to hear inquiries made for the missing man; but as no one appeared to notice his absence they finally concluded that he was off duty for a time, and congratulated themselves upon the rare good luck of the circumstance.

When it grew quite dark, Mr. Hunting, who, as we know, had made a long voyage in the yacht, and knew every inch of the ground thoroughly, ventured out into the cabin, to reconnoiter and ascertain if further ag-

gressive movements would be practicable, while Ned kept guard in the state-room.

The place was empty.

Nothing was stirring; not a sound was to be heard, but the regular pacing of the man on duty overhead.

Moving with great caution, he ventured to penetrate to the steward's quarters, where he found the man fast asleep in his bunk leading from the pantry, while opposite him slept another sailor—the engineer, who was also off duty, and judging from the fumes which arose from their breath, one or both of the men had imbibed very freely of some potent beverage.

A gleam of triumph shot over Mr. Hunting's face, as he looked upon them.

The first mate and Nicholas, with another man, were ashore; three men were thus well out of the way. A fourth was helpless in Ned's state-room, and one was keeping watch above. But where were the other four?

He skipped out of the pantry, drew the door softly to, locked it, and pocketed the key.

Then he next sought the place where the common sailors lunched and found two more sleeping there; they were probably expected to go on duty during the night and were getting what rest they could beforehand.

The door of this place he also closed, locked and took possession of the key and counted seven men as conquered with scarcely an effort, for he felt that he and Ned could easily master the watch on deck.

But where were the captain and second mate?"

They might be in their state-rooms or they were liable to be in the smoking-room, and toward this place Mr. Hunting now stole.

The door was partially open, and as he approached the place he smelled the smoke from a cigar.

Cautiously drawing nearer he saw the second-mate reading a novel and enjoying his smoke, while on the table, by his side, there stood a bottle and a glass.

The man dared not attempt to fasten him in the room, for he feared he would make a disturbance and arouse every one else; so he sped back to the saloon, crossed it, and softly opened the door of the captain's state-room.

It was empty, but his quick eye caught sight of a black leather case lying upon a table near his berth.

In another moment he had it open and, with a smothered exclamation of joy, seized the two handsomely mounted revolvers which lay within it.

Both were loaded, and, with a heart beating high with hope, he hastened back to Ned's state-room.

He felt that the game was now all in their hands.

It did not matter much where the captain was, now that he was armed with these formidable weapons; he and Ned could conquer six unarmed men with them.

He tapped gently upon the door, which was instantly opened by the young man.

He beckoned him to come forth, which he instantly did, locking the door after him.

Mr. Hunting put one of the revolvers into his hand, and with his lips close to his ear whispered:

"Every man on board, except the captain, second mate and the watch, is under lock and key. The second mate is in the smoking-room. The captain, I imagine, is on deck with the watch, and we shall have to tackle them hand to hand, after which we will pounce upon

The second mate, if all goes well. Are your nerves strong and steady?"

Ned simply nodded, but the look in his eye plainly told that he meant business.

"We must creep softly up the companionway, where you must pick your man and I mine," Hunting continued. "At the muzzle of these revolvers we will drive them down here and lock them up, then go for the mate, after which we shall have full swing. Does the plan suit you?"

"Yes; it is well thought out," said Ned, briefly.

"Are you ready?"

"All ready."

Stealthily, with the tread of a cat, they crept up the hatchway, pausing on every stair to listen.

Ned, with the eagerness and enthusiasm of youth, went first, but stopped the moment his head was above deck to reconnoiter.

"The captain is sitting by a ventilator, smoking—the watch is pacing the quarterdeck," he whispered to his companion.

"You go for the mate—I will take the captain."

"All right," Mr. Hunting responded, then added, cautiously. "Be sure you do not flinch, Heatherton; the least mistake on our part will spoil everything."

"Don't you fear. I've something dearer than life at stake." Ned breathed, but with a suppressed fierceness which betrayed that he was indeed a desperate man.

Fortunately the watch was at the farther end of his beat, his back toward them, as the two men stepped on deck, and, covering him with his revolver, Hunting waited where he was, while Ned glided around

toward the ventilator, which half concealed the captain from his view.

Then, as he saw the young man raise his right arm and point his weapon in that direction, he called out in a stern, authoritative tone to the watch:

"Halt!"

CHAPTER XIX.

NED AND MR. HUNTING SUCCEEDED IN CARRYING OUT
THEIR PLANS.

At that startling word the watch wheeled around to find himself, to his great astonishment, looking straight into the muzzle of the dangerous weapon in the hands of William Hunting.

The captain also sprang to his feet, tossing his cigar overboard in the act, to find confronting him, with resolute mien and a cocked revolver in his hand, the young man whom he believed to be safely locked within his state-room below.

"Thunder and lightning!" he ejaculated, and for once startled out of his habitual composure.

"If you make the slightest disturbance or resistance, I will shoot, as sure as I stand here," Ned said, in a low, stern tone and with a look on his white, set face which told that he meant every word that he uttered.

"This beats the deuce!" growled the disconcerted captain. "You've stolen a fine march on us, for sure, young man; what does it mean?"

"It means that we two men have made a bold stroke for our freedom——"

"You two men!" repeated the captain, amazed.

Then as he glanced over toward the quarter deck and saw Mr. Hunting driving the watch toward the companionway, before the muzzle of his weapon, he comprehended that they had indeed gained the upper hand; but how they had accomplished it was more than he could understand.

"I have no wish to do you any violence, sir," Ned continued, in a respectful tone, "and I will not if you do not resist me; but, I assure you, I am in no trifling mood, and I shall be obliged to invite you to go below at once."

"What for?" questioned the man, sharply.

"To occupy your state-room."

"And be locked in?" the proud officer demanded, in a voice that trembled with anger.

"Yes, sir."

"And desert my post?" he continued, flushing hotly.

"For the present—yes."

"But I may have a message from the owner of this yacht at any moment, commanding me to steam up and be ready to sail."

"I cannot help that; my will must be paramount to the owner's for a time. Take care, sir!" Ned interposed in a warning tone, as the man appeared about to spring upon him. "I should regret to have your blood upon my hands, but I am desperate, I tell you, and I will bore a hole through you in a twinkling, as sure as fate, if you show fight."

"What, ho——" the really brave man began and determined that he would not yield without a struggle; but the gleam of the revolver's muzzle just before his eyes warned him to stop, while Ned quietly remarked:

"Every man below is at our mercy—we took good care of them before we ventured on deck, so no one can come to your assistance. Now, right about face, and march!"

The man saw that it would be useless to resist, particularly as Mr. Hunting, having secured his own prisoner below, now made his appearance on deck, with the evident intention of assisting Ned if necessary.

With a sullen and dejected air, therefore, he turned about and walked quietly downstairs to his own stateroom, which he entered, while Mr. Hunting closed and locked the door after him.

The moment this was achieved the two men sprang swiftly and noiselessly toward the smoking-room, where they made short work of overcoming and binding the second mate, who, having taken a glass too much, was almost on the verge of a drunken stupor.

When this was accomplished, Ned's hands fell weakly by his side, and, for a moment, it seemed as if all his strength would desert him.

"We are saved," he said, with a long drawn breath of relief.

"Yes, I hope so, but come above where the air will revive you, for we have yet much to do, and no time to lose," returned his companion, who was scarcely less unnerved.

They locked the door of the smoking-room, then once more hastened on deck, where they soon regained their composure and strength as the cool refreshing salt air blew over them.

"We must fasten down the companionway hatch," Ned remarked, after a few moments, "then we need have no fear of any of the men below, even though they

should succeed in getting out of their rooms," and together they closed and secured it.

"Now you will remain here to guard everything while I take a boat and go ashore to report what we have done to some officer and telegraph to Boston," remarked Ned, referring to the plan which they had previously discussed.

"Yes, but in case the other men should return——" Mr. Hunting began, in a doubtful tone, for now that he was about to be left alone in such a responsible position, he feared unforeseen difficulties against which he might not be able to cope single-handed.

"They will not—they are sure to remain away until long after midnight, and before that time I will be back with officers, who will take the vessel into their custody and relieve us of all responsibility. You may be very sure, Mr. Hunting, that I will let no grass grow under my feet," Ned replied, all his native energy returning to him in view of the duties before him. Then he added, as he sprang to the davits, "Now help me to lower this boat and I will be off."

This was quickly done, and Ned, hastily descending the steps which had been left down for the return of the absent sailors, sprang nimbly into the boat, seized the oars and began to pull vigorously toward the shore, while Mr. Hunting went back to his lonely vigil on deck.

An hour later Ned entered the headquarters of the police in Halifax and asked to see the chief, privately, on important business.

His request was granted, and he was immediately conducted to the private office of that dignitary.

"Mr. Officer," Ned began, in his frank, straightforward way, "you will doubtless be greatly surprised by the communication which I am about to make to you,

and, to come to the point at once, you have probably heard of the recent robbery of the Third National Bank in Boston."

The man merely nodded, but his keen eyes instantly began to glow with the fire of a sleuth hound after his prey.

"Well, I am Edward Heatherton," Ned continued; "of course my name has been blazoned throughout the land in connection with it——"

"Zounds!" interrupted the amazed officer, and springing to his feet he took his stand by the door, as if he feared that Ned would vanish by magic through it, while he regarded the young man with undisguised astonishment, for he, with hosts of others, firmly believed that Edward Heatherton had robbed the Boston bank.

Ned smiled with some amusement.

"Pray, do not fear, sir," he quietly resumed. "I have no intention of leaving the room until I have told you my story. I am no thief, although you may have good reason for believing me to be one. Please sit down, as I have quite a long tale to relate and I must be as brief as possible."

He took a chair and placed it against the door, to prove his assertion that he had no desire to leave the place; then dropping upon a chair opposite the man, he related all that had occurred to him since leaving the bank on that memorable Saturday, nearly two weeks previous.

The chief listened attentively throughout the recital, never once removing his sharp eyes from Ned's face, never interrupting him.

When the young man concluded, however, he observed with evident satisfaction:

"Well, well, youngster, if what you tell me is true,

you have put a fine job into my hands, as well as made a pretty penny on your own account; for there is a big reward offered for the discovery of the stolen property."

"I don't care anything about the reward, if I can but regain the confidence of my employers and clear my name, before the world, of the stain which now rests upon it," Ned said, with great earnestness. "And, now," he continued, "if you will come with me I will convince you of the truth of what I have told you. I trust, too, that you will be as expeditious in your arrangements as possible, for my companion is alone on the Bald Eagle, and if the other sailors should return, he would probably be overpowered, the captain and crew liberated, and all would escape with the booty."

"All right; we will be on board the Bald Eagle inside of an hour," the chief remarked, in a business-like tone, as he arose and touched an electric button, whereupon another officer immediately entered the room.

The two consulted together for a few minutes, then the late comer departed to attend to the orders he had received, while the superior officer sat down at his desk and wrote rapidly for a while.

When he had finished, folded, and addressed his epistle, he called a messenger and sent it off, then arose and began his preparations to accompany Ned back to the yacht.

"If you please, I should like to send a message to my late employers before we leave the city," Ned observed, after watching the man's movements for a while.

"Hum!" said the man, reflectively, as he glanced keenly at him. "I think we'll wait a little; your friends could not get your message until to-morrow morning even if you should send it. There will be time enough

after my duties have been attended to, and a few hours won't make much difference to you."

Ned saw that he was regarded with some suspicion, in spite of the revelation he had made, therefore he resolved to wait until the chief should give him permission to send a telegram to Mr. Cranston, although he was very anxious to promptly report himself and clear his name from suspicion.

A little later the messenger who had been dispatched with the letter returned, whereupon the chief signified his readiness to start for the yacht.

Ned sprang to his feet with alacrity, and the three men left the room together.

In the outer room they were joined by two others, and then Ned led the way to the wharf where his boat was moored.

They were obliged to procure another, as the yacht's boat was not large enough to accommodate them all, and Ned's heart bounded with new hope, as seizing an oar, he helped to propel the light craft toward the vessel, where his friend Hunting was awaiting him, and where he believed the stolen treasure would soon be rescued and restored to his employers.

They reached the yacht a little before midnight, and without encountering any other boat on their way; and as they stepped upon the iron stairway leading to the deck, Mr. Hunting leaned over the railing above, and calling out in a low, anxious tone:

"Heatherton, is everything all right?"

"All right," Ned answered, cheerily, and in less than two minutes the five newcomers were all standing upon the deck.

The chief soon made his arrangements for the night. He stationed his three men in various portions of the yacht below, to make sure that no mischief should brew

in that quarter; then he, with Ned and Mr. Hunting, remained upon the deck to await the return of the first mate and his companions.

It was between three and four in the morning when they came.

Everything was quiet on board the yacht, and they had not a suspicion of the fate awaiting them.

"Ship ahoy!" the mate called out, as the boat shot alongside the iron stairway.

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the subdued response that answered the greeting from above, whereupon the men ran lightly up the steps, to be immediately confronted by the powerful policeman, Ned, and Mr. Hunting.

"Not a word, my men," said the chief, as he leveled a revolver at them; "you are my prisoners. Behave yourselves and no harm shall befall you; make any disturbance and into irons you will go quicker than you will relish?"

"What is the meaning of this invasion?" the mate demanded, in a voice that was far from steady.

"It means that you, with all the rest of the crew, are under arrest."

"What for?"

"That is a question which will have to be answered later."

"Where is the captain?"

"In his stateroom, subject to the same restrictions as yourself."

The mate made no further resistance, but submitted, with his companions, to be led below and locked up, while Ned, Mr. Hunting and the officer continued their watch on deck for the remainder of the night.

When morning dawned the steward was released upon solemnly promising that he would attend to his

regular duties, and make no effort to release any of the crew.

The men must be fed, and there seemed to be no better way to supply their needs.

He was only too glad to comply with whatever conditions the chief chose to impose upon him, but his movements were closely watched by one of the officers below.

Nichols was also detailed to do service on deck, under the eyes of the three watchful men stationed there.

After breakfast, Ned was upon the point of starting again for the city, in the company of one of the officers, to telegraph to the —— Bank his suspicions that the stolen treasure was concealed aboard the Bald Eagle when they espied in the distance a boat containing two persons making toward the yacht.

They concluded to wait a while, hoping that the orders which the captain was expecting from the owner were about to be delivered.

They were not disappointed.

The boat headed directly for the yacht; and when it was within hailing distance, one of the men sang out:

"Is Captain Bleiberg of the Bald Eagle on board?"

"Tell him yes," the chief commanded of Nichols.

"Ay, ay, sir!" obediently responded the man.

"I have a telegram for him," came back from the messenger in the boat, "and he must sign for it."

"Go for it and bring the book to me," said the officer.

Nichols obeyed.

The officer signed for Captain Bleiberg and sent the book back; then deliberately tore open the message and read it.

A grim smile passed over his face as he did so, and Ned's heart gave a great bound when he looked up and beckoned to him.

"Read it," he said, as he put the message into Ned's hands, and the young man's eyes devoured it greedily.

It ran thus :

I shall arrive Friday evening about eight. Meet me at wharf, and be ready to sail immediately. Gould.

"We're sure of our bird now," said the chief, with a chuckle.

Ned grew pale, in spite of the thrill of exultation in his heart.

"What will you do?—go to the city to arrest him?" he inquired, as he passed the telegram to Mr. Hunting.

"No; we will send a boat to meet him, as he orders; then, when he arrives, we will place him under arrest, and have our rogues all together," the officer returned.

"Who will you send with the boat?" Mr. Hunting asked.

"Nichols, attended by one of my subordinates."

"Will he not suspect that something is wrong when he sees that the yacht is not ready to sail?" said Ned.

"I don't care what he suspects after we once get eyes on our man," the officer replied; then he added: "And now you can send word to your firm as soon as you choose. Tell them to dispatch some one armed with proper authority immediately, and we'll have this business settled up at short notice."

So Ned went ashore and sent his telegram, notifying the officers of the bank of his whereabouts, and entreating them to send some one to him without delay, and one capable of identifying the property belonging to the bank, in case it should be found, as he hoped, on board the *Bald Eagle*.

He longed to send some word to his mother, also, but concluded that it would be better to wait a day or two, until he should ascertain just how long he was liable to be detained in Halifax.

His heart also went out, with longing, toward Gertrude. He knew her address, and was half tempted to go to her that very day and explain to her all the mysterious circumstances of the last two weeks.

Then he told himself that it would be wiser to wait until everything was settled and he could go to her cleared from all suspicion.

While he was sure that she would have faith in him and believe whatever he should tell her, yet he would not be able to prove anything until the treasure was found and restored to those to whom it belonged.

Then he could face her, proud in his own integrity, and feeling that no one could cast a slur upon his name.

CHAPTER XX.

MORE TREACHEROUS PLOTTING.

But could Ned have known the treachery of which his dear one was about to become the victim, his joy over the recent conquest which he had achieved would have been greatly marred. Could he have known that even then, a message, purporting to come from him, was being prepared to lure Gertrude into a miserable trap, he would have been wretched indeed.

Bill Bunting had been greatly chagrined by the scornful reception and rejection which the beautiful girl had accorded his proposal of marriage to her. Vowing that he would yet humiliate her haughty spirit, and at the same time revenge himself upon Ned, he began from that moment to plan for the accomplishment of his purpose.

As we have seen, he was associated with Gould, in his various crimes and schemes, and it was only with

his assistance that the man had been able to carry out to a successful issue the bold robbery of the — Bank. Consequently he had been obliged to agree to certain conditions which Bill named, and among others, that he should be allowed to flee the country in the yacht with him, and Gould should also assist him to decoy Gertrude aboard the vessel, and compel her to be the companion of the flight. This could be very easily accomplished, he said, since the girl was already in Halifax. The wretch hoped, by thus compromising her, to finally force her to marry him.

Gould protested that such a proceeding would be very unwise, if not dangerous; they would have enough to do, he said, to look out for their own safety, without burdening themselves with a woman. While, too, with Ned also on board, the lovers would be liable to discover the presence of each other, and make them no end of trouble.

But Bill was obstinate. He said they could drop Ned at the first port they sighted, and he need never suspect that the girl was on board.

Gould knew that he was in the fellow's power, and he did not dare refuse to co-operate with him. Therefore, he appeared to yield to his objections, though he secretly vowed that he would get rid of Bill at the first foreign port they ran into and thus save the girl from the wretched fate he had planned for her.

We know that a little more than a week after the robbery and disappearance of Ned, Gertrude left for Halifax with her friend, Mrs. Page, and the following Wednesday Mr. and Mrs. Langmaid sailed for Europe.

Gertrude, as may be supposed, went back feeling very sad and unhappy, for aside from her anxiety about her mother's health, she had many misgivings regarding the fate of her lover, and she began to grow

pale and hollow-eyed, greatly to Mrs. Page's uneasiness.

The good lady exerted herself to cheer her, and planned many ways to keep her mind occupied, and prevent her from brooding over her troubles.

During the day while they were together, she succeeded to a certain extent, but when night came and Gertrude retired to the solitude of her own room, the old anxieties would return and she spent long hours in tears and sobs.

Ned and his friend, Mr. Hunting, achieved their wonderful triumph over the crew of the Bald Eagle on Thursday night, and for Friday Mrs. Page had planned a little excursion into the country for the benefit of her young charge.

She owned a farm a few miles out of the city which she rented on shares, and she thought it might be a pleasant change for Gertrude to spend a day or two there, while she herself had business with the farmer, which required her own presence there.

But the poor girl had spent such a wretched night, that she was not able to rise from her bed when Friday morning dawned, so the trip for her was utterly out of the question.

This was a great disappointment to Mrs. Page, who, having promised her tenant that she would go that day, to give some directions to the carpenters regarding needed repairs, felt that it was absolutely necessary for her to keep her appointment.

Gertrude told her not to mind leaving her, that she only needed rest, and would lie quietly in bed and try to sleep the time away, while she was gone.

Her friend promised that she would return that day, although she could not reach home until evening, and after giving orders to the servants to attend faithfully,

to the young girl's comfort, she bade her an affectionate good-by and departed.

Gertrude slept most of the forenoon, for she was literally exhausted with so much grieving, and finally when she awoke, feeling greatly refreshed, she arose and dressed herself.

After partaking of a tempting breakfast she sat down to the piano, thinking to while away an hour or two in learning a difficult nocturn which her teacher had recently given her.

While thus engaged the door bell rang a violent peal and presently a servant entered the drawing-room and handed to her a note, bearing the local postmark.

It was addressed to her in bold, but unfamiliar characters, and she opened it with no curiosity.

"My dear Gertrude," the note began.

"Why, who in Halifax knows me well enough to address me thus?" Gertrude exclaimed; then referring to the end of the note she read with great astonishment, and no little excitement, the name of "Edward Heatherton."

The name, however, was not like the other writing. It resembled Ned's chirography, but looked as if it had been traced with difficulty and with a trembling hand.

Turning back to the beginning of the note she read with a pale and startled face, the following:

My Dear Gertrude:—You will doubtless wonder at receiving a note from me, written in a strange hand; but I am ill and not able to write myself. I am also in deep trouble, as, of course, you already know, and am at present confined to my stateroom on board a vessel in which I shall sail to-morrow, Saturday, for a foreign country, and thus forever sever every tie which binds me to my native land. There is much that I would like to say to you regarding what has recently occurred, and I feel that I cannot go without seeing you once more, for it is probable that we shall never meet again. Will you come to me, Gertrude, for a final farewell? It is a bold request, but I dare not go to you; and, for the sake of the past, I entreat you not to fail me in this my hour

of despair. I must also ask you to observe the utmost secrecy, if you accede to my request, for my personal safety depends upon it. A carriage will be waiting for you at the corner, near your residence, at eight o'clock this evening, and a guide will be with it to attend you, if your heart has not become so hardened against me that you have no desire to see me again.

Oh! I pray you do not desert me this last boon, before I leave you to become an alien and an outcast, for all time. As you approach the carriage speak the word "Eagle" and the guide will know that you are the one he is to bring to me. Ever, but hopelessly yours,
Edward Heatherton.

Gertrude was in tears before she had half finished this torturing letter, and a feeling of utter despair settled upon her heart.

The tone of the whole epistle went to prove that Ned was guilty of the dreadful crime attributed to him. It had, in fact, been cunningly worded with this intention. It seemed to the stricken girl that she could not bear this fresh sorrow for, in spite of her loyalty to her lover and her repeated assertions to her father that she would never lose faith in him, she was now compelled to believe that he had fallen, and that he was, indeed, lost to her forever. She could not marry a felon, and when Ned left the country, they would surely be "parted for all time."

"Oh! I cannot have it so," she wailed, a tempest of agony, of utter desolation and despair, sweeping over her soul. "He seemed so innately noble and true, I never would have believed, but for this, that he could be guilty of such a crime. How can I give him up? What shall I do? How can I let him go away into exile and never see him again? My whole life is ruined also. I have loved him with my whole heart. I love him now, in spite of all, and to him—or at least to what I believe him—I must be true until I die."

She walked the floor in restless wretchedness, tears raining over her face, great, heart-broken sobs burst-

ing from her quivering lips, while she tried to decide whether she would go to him or not.

"He is ill, poor fellow!" she murmured, referring again to the letter. "In a moment of temptation he has fallen, and now he is reaping the bitter fruits of his reckless act. Oh! Ned, Ned; it does not seem as if I could believe it, even now, with this terrible evidence before me. Who can have written this note for him?" she went on, as she studied the strange writing, yet never questioning the truth of the epistle, since it had that familiar signature at the end. "Can it be some accomplice, and are they both going to escape to another country with the booty! I am afraid so! Shall I go to him? May I not, at least, go and appeal to him to restore what he has taken, and pray him, for my sake, never to yield to temptation again?"

Her heart said "yes;" her judgment told her "no"—that it would be a very unwise thing to do; that it would be far better, if they must part forever, to avoid a harrowing and probably a useless interview.

And yet he was ill; he begged for the "boon of one last word"—a "final farewell."

Could she be hard enough to refuse it?—could she allow him to feel that she condemned him and was utterly indifferent to his misery?—and he must be suffering keenly since he had not been able to write himself, and could hardly trace his signature in a legible manner.

"Oh, if Mrs. Page was only here!" the deeply tried girl sighed, "I would confide in her and ask her advice; but she will not be back until long after eight, and thus I am left to act upon my own responsibility. Papa forbade me to have anything more to say to him," she continued, musingly. "I suppose he would tell me, if he were here, that it would be my duty to give him up

to the authorities, but that I could not do. Was ever any one placed in such a trying position before?"

She threw herself upon a lounge, exhausted from the conflict within her, trembling with nervous excitement, and utterly unable to think her way out of the perplexing situation.

She shrank from going out alone at night, even to meet for the last time the man she so dearly loved, and from trusting herself to a strange guide. All the finer instincts of her womanly nature revolted against the arrangement.

And yet she knew if she refused this last appeal—if she allowed Ned to go forever out of her life without a word of kindly farewell, without earnestly entreating him to restore the money, which she was forced to believe he had taken, and strive to live honorably in the future, she would always regret it, and never cease to reproach herself for having neglected the opportunity.

For his heart-broken mother's sake also she felt as if she owed him this much, and finally, after hours of mental struggle, she resolved to brave everything and grant him the boon he had craved.

Still, as the hour drew near, she recoiled more and more from the trying ordeal, wishing most fervently that Mrs. Page was at home to go with her, as a protector, for she believed that she would attend her in this hour of bitter trial, even though she might not approve of what she contemplated.

Once she resolved that she would take one of the servants; then she reasoned that it would be a great risk—it might result in Ned's arrest, trial and conviction, followed by long years of imprisonment, and she would always feel that she had doomed him to the wretched fate.

No, if she went at all, she must go alone; and finally

putting aside all personal feeling, she decided that she would hazard everything for the sake of comforting Ned and possibly persuading him to do what was right.

At half-past seven she went to her room, telling Mary, the second girl, that she did not wish to be disturbed again that night; if Mrs. Page returned to say that she was better, and hoped to be quite herself again in the morning.

Then locking herself in, she donned a dark street dress and hat, and tied a thick, brown vail over her face, after which she stole softly out of the house without attracting the attention of any one.

She had a latch-key which Mrs. Page had given to her when she first came to Halifax, therefore she knew that she would have no difficulty in getting in again, and hoped that no one would ever be the wiser of her night's adventure.

It lacked just five minutes of eight as she ran lightly down the steps into the street.

The night was cloudy, consequently it was darker than usual at that hour, so that Gertrude did not fear being identified by any one.

She sped along to the corner where she found a carriage stationed as she had expected.

The driver was standing by his horses, as if waiting for some one, and when Gertrude uttered the password "Eagle," which her note directed her to use, he responded, respectfully:

"Yes, miss; it's all right, and the gentleman has sent a stewardness to keep ye company."

He opened the door as he spoke, and Gertrude caught sight of the outlines of a woman's figure seated within the vehicle.

She was greatly relieved, and felt that Ned had been

very thoughtful—as he always was—of her comfort, while she was also very glad that she had not brought a servant along, as she had been tempted to do.

She unhesitatingly entered the carriage, taking the seat opposite her companion, who was of somewhat capacious proportions, the door was closed, the driver sprang upon his seat and away they went through the darkness at a lively speed.

“You are a stewardess,” Gertrude remarked, after several moments of oppressive silence.

“Yes, marm,” was the brief, but half smothered reply.

“What is the name of the vessel to which you belong?”

“Bald Eagle, marm,” in the same tone as before.

“Bald Eagle!” repeated Gertrude, and comprehending now why she had been told to use the latter word as a signal.

“Yes, marm.”

The woman did not appear inclined to be very communicative, Gertrude thought; but she was so nervous and excited she felt that she must talk to some one, so she continued her questions.

“When does the vessel sail?” she inquired.

“To-morrow morning, marm.”

“What port is she bound for?”

“Ahem!—couldn’t say marm, exactly; some—some foreign port most likely.”

“You have a bad cold, haven’t you?” Gertrude observed, for her companion’s tones sounded strangely husky and unnatural.

“Ye—yes, marm,” supplemented by an embarrassed cough.

The young girl felt there was not much satisfaction in trying to carry on a conversation with one so taci-

turn, therefore she gave up the attempt and fell to musing upon the approaching interview with her lover.

The carriage finally stopped, after a rapid drive of perhaps fifteen minutes.

The moment the door was opened the stewardess hastened to alight and Gertrude followed her, but with a sinking heart and faltering steps, down some stairs to the water's edge where a rowboat, with two men seated in it, was moored.

"Oh!" the startled girl exclaimed, and shrinking back, "have we to go in a boat?"

"Yes, marm, but only a short distance," said her companion, trying to speak reassuringly.

"But I thought—I imagined I was only to go aboard some steamer lying at the wharf," Gertrude returned, as she looked about her anxiously, and regretting, all too late, that she had come at all.

It was so dark, everything about her was so dismal and uncanny, while a feeling of distrust of her companions was stealing over her, that she began to be thoroughly frightened.

Another man now made his appearance and curtly called out:

"All board! Step right in, marm, and we'll soon be on the Bald Eagle."

The stewardess was already seated in the boat and, before Gertrude hardly realized how it was done, she found herself sitting beside her and the light craft speeding the dark waters.

CHAPTER XXI.

GERTRUDE'S ABDUCTION IS EXPLAINED TO NED.

Scarcely a word was spoken, except by the men who plied the oars, from the moment the boat left the land-

ing until it glided noiselessly to the foot of the stairway leading to the deck of the Bald Eagle.

Gertrude grew more and more frightened as the distance between her and the shore increased.

She instinctively felt that something was very wrong, and she heartily wished, again and again, that she had never left the safety of her friend's home.

She began to realize that she had acted very foolishly in coming out thus alone and trusting herself to the guidance of entire strangers.

Who were these three men in the boat with her? What kind of a creature was this taciturn "stewardess," who had not once opened her lips since entering the boat?

She was thinking this just as they rounded a projection in the harbor and reached a point where the light upon the mast of the Bald Eagle could be discerned, when a low, fierce oath escaped the lips of the "stewardess," and so startled Gertrude that she with difficulty repressed a cry of terror.

A few moments later the boat reached the vessel, whereupon the "stewardess" instantly arose to leave the boat as if in great haste.

Gertrude was trembling with fear, but she laid her hand upon her companion's arm, remarking:

"I am afraid to go on board this vessel. I do not like the way I have been brought here, and I want to know what it means."

"It's all right," was the muffled reply, then the portly figure sprang out upon the steps and hastened up to the deck.

"It isn't all right, I am sure, and I am not going aboard this vessel," Gertrude said, resolutely, and refusing to rise from her seat.

At this one of the men who had been rowing leaned forward and whispered in her ear :

"Young lady, I don't know how you happen to be here, but you have nothing to fear. Trust me, no harm shall befall you, and you shall go back to the city whenever you like, if there has been any foul play."

"Then I insist upon going back immediately," Gertrude returned authoritatively.

"I'm sorry I can't obey you," was the almost inaudible reply, "but I promise you shall go within an hour if you wish."

Gertrude thought a moment.

She was only half assured of the man's pledge.

"Is Mr. Heatherton on the vessel?" she asked.

"Yes, marm, he is."

Somewhat comforted by this assurance—for she felt confident that no personal harm could befall her where Ned was—she stepped out of the boat and followed the others up the stairway.

But she was seized with a sudden feeling of despair when, the moment they all reached the deck, the iron stairway, by some invisible means, was swung up from the water's edge, and all hope, as she supposed, of escape was cut off.

"Captain Bleiberg! Captain Bleiberg, why are you not in sailing trim, as I ordered? What, ho, there!—why are you all in darkness, and why doesn't some one answer me?"

"Halt!" came the quick, startling response, and before the single word was hardly uttered, a flood of light was thrown on deck from a couple of brilliant lanterns, arranged for that purpose, thus bringing into bold relief every figure of the strange group gathered there, while Gertrude gave vent to a startled cry as she saw it.

Near the companionway stood the figure of the "stewardess"—though a stewardess no longer, for the shawl had been stripped from the broad shoulders, the bonnet from the head, and a finely formed man, the lower portion of his body still enveloped in a dark skirt, stood revealed, while he gazed about him with an expression of amazement and dismay.

It was Gould, the cunning bank robber, who had assumed the disguise of a woman's dress partly to assist Bunting in his vile scheme to decoy Gertrude to the vessel, and partly because he had begun to fear that suspicion had been directed toward him.

Near him was another man, who appeared no less confounded, and the girl's heart gave a startled bound as she recognized Ned's old enemy and her would-be suitor, Bill Bunting; while, surrounding these two, each with a cocked revolver in his hand, were four other men, and one of these, wearing an expression of lofty courage and resolution on his pale face, was—Ned himself!

What could the strange scene mean? The fair girl wondered, and felt faint and weak as she noticed the threatening aspect, the cocked weapons, and resolute faces of the men.

She shrank close to a mast, and throwing her arms around it, leaned against it for support, while she continued to gaze, as if fascinated, upon what was occurring before her.

"Well, —— you! what is the meaning of this?" Gould demanded, fiercely, when he could command his voice sufficiently to speak.

"That question is very easily answered," returned the chief of police, as he stepped to the man's side and laid a powerful hand upon his shoulder. "It simply

means that your game is up, and—you are my prisoner!"

A volley of oaths came from the lips of the startled men, at this disheartening information.

"You can quit that," sternly commanded the officer, "and you may as well yield quietly to the inevitable."

Gould was white to his lips, though his dark eyes burned like two fiery coals as his restless eyes roved from face to face.

He realized that his "game was indeed up," and that he had the very worst to look forward to; yet he bore himself with a haughty composure and bravado which excited both the wonder and admiration of every observer.

"Where is Captain Bleiberg?" he inquired, after a moment of utter silence.

"The captain and all his crew are confined below."

"Was it mutiny?" the man asked, with a quick indrawn breath.

"No, it was the grandest pluck I ever heard of," replied the chief, with a glance at Ned and Mr. Hunting, who were standing side by side a little back of the prisoner.

Gould's eyes followed his, and he gave a violent start.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and the single ejaculation spoke volumes.

It told that he comprehended all the ruin and disaster which must overtake him upon the release of those two men.

"How did you do it?" he faltered.

"I guess we won't stop for any lengthy explanations to-night—it's getting late, and there's considerable to be done yet," the chief interposed. "I think, however, when you hear the story in the presence of a judge and jury, you will be forced to confess that it was the neat-

est job you ever knew of. Now, Mr. Gould,"—in a sharp, authoritative tone—"you and your friend, whoever he may be, will just march below and we'll accommodate you with as comfortable quarters as circumstances will allow, though we happen to be pretty full just now."

Gould turned and looked at his companion.

"Well, Bunting, it is all up with us, I suppose," he said, with white lips.

Bill Bunting did not reply, but he turned his glance upon Ned, who had been unspeakably astonished when the light had been turned on and he recognized his old-time foe, for he had not expected to meet him there.

A look of hate swept over the man's features.

"Curse you, a thousand times!" he hissed; "you down me at every turn. I thought I should best you, this time sure," and utterly losing his head in the heat of his passion at finding himself conquered again by Ned, he sprang upon him, drawing a knife that had been concealed about his person, and aiming it straight at the young man's heart.

There was a faint shriek, then the sound of swift steps and rustling garments, and the next instant the ruffian's arm was stricken upward, and Gertrude stood between him and her lover, pale as a spirit, but with the courage of a dauntless love stamped upon her beautiful features, as she thus confronted the would-be-murderer.

But strong hands came to the rescue. The man was quickly overpowered, his weapon wrested from him, and he was dragged down the companionway to the cabin, while Gould was also conducted thither, and both were put in irons to make sure of no attempt on their part to escape.

When Bill Bunting had sprung upon his hated foe,

Ned's revolver was knocked from his grasp and sent spinning across the deck; fortunate circumstances, as it proved, since it left his hands free to catch the half-fainting girl who had dared so much to save his life.

Ned, himself, almost reeled as his eyes fell upon her, for, until that instant, he had not dreamed of her presence on the yacht.

"Gertrude!" he cried, appalled, as he bore the almost helpless girl to a chair, in which he tenderly seated her. "My darling, what does this mean? How came you to be here with those dreadful men? Where are your friends? What am I to do for you?"

Gertrude was too much overcome to give any satisfactory reply just then to his hasty inquiries, and, leaving her there for a few moments, Ned dashed down to the saloon, where he procured a glass of wine from the steward, then bounded back again to Gertrude and commanded her to drink every drop of it.

She obeyed him readily enough, but her eyes studied his face anxiously and appealingly the while.

The wine both strengthened and quieted her and she smiled faintly, as she thanked him and returned the empty glass.

"Now, my dear girl," Ned said, as he brought another chair and seated himself before her, "you must tell me the meaning of this startling appearance—I could not have been more astonished if one had appeared to me from the dead."

"And you didn't send for me to come to you?" murmured Gertrude, who began to comprehend something of the trap that had been set for her unwary feet, although there were some mysteries about it yet which would need further explanation.

"Send for you, darling!—to come here, alone, at this time of night!" Ned cried, amazed. "Assuredly,

not. Is it possible that you could imagine that I would subject you to anything so disagreeable and so imprudent?"

"But did you not—no, of course you didn't," Gertrude began, somewhat incoherently, then suddenly stopped as she realized that the note she had received was only a part of the plot to lure her away from home.

"Did I not what?" Ned inquired, determined to get to the bottom of the strange affair.

"I received a note, this afternoon, purporting to come from you," Gertrude replied. "Here it is; read it, it will explain itself," she added, drawing it from her pocket and putting it in his hands.

He turned it to the light, and as he read the note, his face clouded with sudden anger and alarm.

"It is a miserable scheme to get you into trouble of some kind, and yet I cannot comprehend it," Ned said, in perplexity when he had finished the perusal of it.

"I think I can," replied Gertrude, whose confidence in her lover was increasing every moment.

Then she told him of the visit, which Bill Bunting had paid her, only the day following their drive to Auburndale, and of his audacious proposals to her, with her newly aroused suspicions that he had done this to trap her into a marriage with him.

"It is a veritable case of abduction!" Ned exclaimed, as she concluded.

"He and Gould were accomplices in that robbery, and in other crimes; they were about to escape from the country, and—yes, I believe that wretch lured you here with the intention of taking you with them and perhaps forcing you into a marriage, as you surmise."

The young man felt as if he could scarcely contain himself, and it was well for his enemy, perhaps, that

he had been put in confinement below, before this revelation.

"It would have been horrible," the young girl cried, with a shudder.

"Yes, indeed," Ned said; but since she was now safe, other thoughts began to assert themselves, and he continued, as he bent forward to look into her eyes: "Gertrude, have you believed that I was guilty of the crime with which I have been charged?"

The sensitive girl colored at the grave question; but, meeting his glance unwaveringly, she replied:

"Ned, I had the utmost faith in you until I received this note only a few hours ago; and you, yourself, can understand what it implies. But now, looking into your face once more, I know that you are as true as truth itself."

"Bless you, my own darling, for this comforting assurance!" Ned exclaimed, with deep emotion, "it has lifted a great burden from my heart. Yes, I can understand that if you believed this note—and that you did believe it, your presence here proves—you must have thought that I just the same as admitted my guilt. But, dear, although every circumstance has seemed to point to me, as the author of that crime, I am as innocent of it as you are. Let me tell you, too, that we have the real robber safe in hand, and I believe that the stolen treasure is all concealed on board this vessel, and will soon be restored to the bank."

"Can it be possible?" Gertrude joyfully exclaimed. Then she added, as she slipped both her small hands confidingly into his: "Oh, Ned, tell me all that has happened to you since that dreadful day."

Her act touched him deeply; it was so spontaneous and trustful that it told him more plainly than words

could have done, that she believed in him fully, and loved him as truly as ever.

"I will, my dearest, but not just now. I must think and act for you first. Of course, your friend, Mrs. Page, does not know where you are," he remarked, in a troubled tone.

"No," Gertrude answered, flushing, and then she told him of Mrs. Page's absence from the city, and how she had come unknown to every one in the house, in response to his supposed request.

"I am appalled when I think of it," Ned said. "That wretch might have taken you to a distant land, and there would have been no one to rescue you from his power."

"I am afraid it was very thoughtless and imprudent," Gertrude faltered. Then she looked up at him with shining eyes, and continued: "But, Ned, I believe—I should do it again if I thought you were in trouble and needed me."

Ned lifted one of the hands he was holding and touched it softly with his lips at the brave assurance.

Then he arose with a resolute air.

"I must see about taking you back immediately," he said. "You will not mind sitting here alone for a few moments while I go to make the necessary arrangements?" he added, inquiringly.

"No, indeed," the fair girl replied, her face taking on a happier look than it had worn for many days.

Ned was the same true, noble-hearted fellow that he had always been, and her cup of joy could ask for nothing more just then.

The young man went directly to the chief and briefly explained to him the circumstances of Gertrude's singular abduction, asking permission to take a boat and one of the sailors and attend her back to the city.

His request was readily granted, and the chief added that an officer should also go with them as an additional protection, and in less than fifteen minutes they were flying over the waters back toward Halifax.

When they reached the wharf Ned called a carriage, and, telling the sailor that he would be back in the course of an hour, the two young people proceeded directly to the house of Mrs. Page.

Ned related on the way all the trying experiences of the last two weeks, and also rehearsed the great wrong perpetrated upon Mr. Hunting, who, he explained, was the inventor of the "Eureka Pump," in which Mr. Langmaid came so near investing.

"How very strange!" Gertrude exclaimed, when he concluded; "and it has been dreadful for you both. Oh, Ned, I have been so utterly wretched during these last two weeks!—they have seemed like years to me—we, your mother and I, were so afraid that something terrible had happened to you," and again her hand was slipped confidingly into that of her lover.

Ned clasped it warmly.

"And I too, my darling," he returned, in a tremulous voice, "have suffered more than I can tell you, in view of what my friends would have to endure on my account; but, most of all, because of the stain which I knew rested upon my good name."

"Yes, indeed; I know you must have been nearly wild about it. But, Ned, dear, old Mr. Lawson trusted you to the end——"

"To the end! What do you mean, Gertrude?" Ned cried, in a startled tone, and with a sudden heart-sinking.

"I forgot that you could not know, or I would not have spoken so abruptly," Gertrude responded, regret-

fully. "But, Ned, Mr. Lawson died the next Tuesday after that dreadful Saturday."

Ned's face was unutterably sad as he listened to this sorrowful intelligence.

"My dear old friend," he said, with deep emotion, "how can I bear to know that I shall never see you again?"

And tears of genuine grief gathered in his eyes and rolled over his cheeks while Gertrude related all the circumstances attending Mr. Lawson's death.

"And you say he died believing in my innocence, in spite of all?" he questioned, when he could compose himself sufficiently to speak.

"Yes, with almost his last breath, he asserted it to you mother," the young girl returned.

"That is very comforting to me," Ned said, with a deep sigh of relief. "I should have grieved sorely if he had died believing that I could repay all his kindness to my mother and myself with such base ingratitude and such reckless criminality."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION.

When Ned and Gertrude arrived at Mrs. Page's they found that the lady had returned only a few moments previous, and was just upon the point of retiring.

She was greatly astonished when, upon opening the door in answer to their ring, she found her young charge, whom she supposed was fast asleep in her own room, standing outside in company of a fine-looking young man, who was an utter stranger to her.

Gertrude soon explained her adventure to her satis-

faction, although she chided her for being so imprudent, and Ned, after chatting a while, upon his own trials and experiences, arose and departed, but promising to make another call, if possible before he left for Boston.

He returned to the Bald Eagle feeling very light hearted, for he believed that the outlook for the future was now very bright and promising for him.

On the evening of the next day, a Boston detective, accompanied by Mr. Cranston, who had returned from his vacation immediately upon learning of the bank robbery, arrived in Halifax, empowered with all authority necessary to conduct the formalities for the arrest and extradition of the criminals, and the recovery of the property of which they had robbed the bank, should it be found in their possession.

The Bald Eagle was thoroughly searched, and the stolen treasure was finally discovered in a cunningly contrived safe, which had been built into the vessel behind the berth in the state-room occupied by Gould, the owner.

To Ned's exceeding joy the bonds, which had been stolen from him during his trip from Albany, were also found in the safe, thus proving the truth of his assertions regarding their loss, and clearing him from all suspicion of dishonesty.

The money, of course, had been used, but Mr. Lawson's generosity had replaced that, so the bank would lose nothing through him, and his gratitude knew no bounds.

These revelations were regarded as *prima facie* evidence against the owner of the Bald Eagle, and on Monday morning, legal steps were instituted to bring the offenders—for Bill Bunting was, of course, regarded as an accomplice—to justice.

Of course, this took some little time, on account of the formalities required in transferring the criminals from the jurisdiction of one country to that of another, and Ned was permitted, meanwhile, to enjoy himself in his own way, which, as may be supposed, was to spend as much time as possible in the company of Gertrude.

The meeting between him and Mr. Cranston had been a most joyful one, and the man could not have expressed more hearty satisfaction over Ned's entire vindication, if he had been his own son.

"You have had a hard time of it, my boy," he remarked, regarding him with genuine sympathy, as he shook him cordially by the hand; "but you deserve great praise for the courage and good judgment you have shown in helping to rescue the treasure from those audacious knaves. You will reap a bountiful reward for it, too."

"All the reward I ask is to be restored to the full confidence of my employers," the young man returned with evident emotion.

"That you will be, I can emphatically promise," Mr. Cranston replied; "and I know every one connected with the bank will rejoice as heartily as I do over the fact."

All legal formalities were at length concluded, and the prisoners were transferred to the custody of the United States officers.

It was then, thought best to run the yacht and all on board directly to Boston; that being considered the safest way to convey the valuable papers and treasure, and the prisoners also to that city.

It was a joyful day to Ned when he once more entered the bank in Boston, and was most heartily and kindly welcomed back by every one employed there.

But the most joyful meeting of all was with his mother, whose confidence in her dear boy's integrity had never for a moment wavered.

There was much to be told on both sides, and Ned was not a little astonished to learn among other things of his father's return and of the stand he had taken regarding Mr. Lawson's property.

He was, of course, very indignant over the proposals that had been made to his mother to relinquish her right of dowry.

"If Mr. Lawson made a will, leaving his fortune, or any portion of it, to us, we will have it, if it is possible to secure it," he resolutely remarked. "At all events, we will be in no hurry to settle with our haughty relatives."

Ned was immediately received back in the bank, but advanced to a more honorable position, with a proportionate increase of salary.

A portion of the reward offered for the recovery of the treasure was also tendered to him, but he refused to accept one dollar of it.

He was more than paid, he said, in the satisfaction he experienced over the return of the money and papers, and to know that he once more stood a clean man before the world.

The robber Gould was tried, found guilty, and condemned to fifteen years' hard labor in the State prison at Charlestown; and Bill Bunting, as his accomplice, received a sentence for seven years. An additional sentence of five years was pronounced upon each for having defrauded William Hunting of a valuable invention, and forcibly depriving him of his liberty for many months.

One morning, just as Ned was on the point of leaving for the bank, the bell rang, and presently a servant

came to him, saying there was a gentleman in the library who wished to see him.

He at once repaired thither, and was greatly surprised to find his grandfather, Thomas Heatherton, awaiting him.

The man looked fifteen years older than when he had last seen him, and seemed both ill and broken in spirit.

He greeted Ned with much of his former coldness and hauteur, however, and stated that his son having been called away on a long journey, he had been empowered to act as his attorney, in the settlement of Mr. Lawson's affairs, and it was his desire to come to some terms with Ned and his mother without further delay.

Ned courteously replied that he had been so busy since his return to Boston that he had not been able to give much thought to the matter; but that he would at once seek the advice of some reliable lawyer, and promptly communicate his decision to Mr. Heatherton.

His manner, though fraught with all the respect due to one so much older than himself, was characterized by a self-possession and dignity which made the man so realize the true nobility of his hitherto despised grandson that he appeared both constrained and uncomfortable before him.

Indeed, Ned remarked afterward that he acted as if oppressed with a sense of guilt.

That same afternoon, as Ned was walking toward Court square, and wondering whom he should employ as a lawyer to conduct the negotiations with Mr. Heatherton, some one came up beside him and held out a hand in friendly greeting.

Looking up he saw an elderly gentleman, whom he had met occasionally at Mr. Lawson's, and who, he

knew, had been upon very amicable terms with him for many years.

"How are you, my young friend?" he cordially inquired. "I have been meditating a visit to you ever since my return from Europe, a week ago, as I have some important business to transact with you."

Ned looked surprised and wondered what he could mean; but he returned his greeting and remarked that he was looking unusually well.

"Yes, yes; the voyage did me a world of good," Mr. Marble responded; "but I was greatly shocked to learn of the death of my friend. It was very sudden, was it not?"

"Yes, sir, and we miss him more than I can express," Ned answered, sadly.

"No doubt—no doubt," remarked Mr. Marble, gravely. Then, assuming an air of business, he inquired: "Are you at liberty—can you spare me a little of your time for a private talk?"

"Certainly, sir; I am at your service for as long as you wish, and I am not sure but you are the very man I need to attend to a legal matter for me," Ned replied, as he remembered that the man was considered a very shrewd lawyer.

"Well, well, one thing at a time. I'll get my own burdens off my mind, then I will attend to yours," said the gentleman, smiling. Then he added: "Suppose we slip into the Parker House, where we can talk without the fear of interruption."

Ned agreed to this proposal, and, upon repairing thither, Mr. Marble engaged a private room, where, after they were comfortably seated, he inquired of his companion, while he fixed a searching look upon him:

"Heatherton, did you ever hear Mr. Lawson say anything about making a will?"

Ned started at the question.

It seemed a strange coincidence that the man should have broached the very subject that was in his own mind.

"No, sir; Mr. Lawson never mentioned, in my presence, his intentions regarding the disposition of his property," he replied; "but, shortly before his death, he confided to my mother that he had made a will."

"Ah! Did he give her any information regarding its contents?"

"Yes, sir," Ned replied with some embarrassment.

"Then, of course, you know to whom he intended to leave his fortune. Did he tell you where this will was to be found?" Mr. Marble inquired, regarding the young man searchingly.

"He told my mother that it was in the safe. It may be that his mind wandered when he said this, but we have supposed that it was—stolen, since, upon his return from New York, after his sister's burial, the safe was found to have been forced. If the will was stolen, I do not think he discovered the fact, or else he did not have time to make a thorough examination of his papers before the fatal shock," Ned explained.

He thought a moment, then he proceeded to confide to his companion all that had occurred regarding the claims of his father and grandfather, their proposals for settlement, and his own perplexity over the matter.

Mr. Marble listened attentively to his recital, and then remarked:

"Now, my young friend, I will solve this knotty problem for you. I drew up Mr. Lawson's will, and, after it was signed and sealed, he delivered it into my hands, to be cared for until his death. Then he asked me to give him a copy of it. I thought this was a somewhat peculiar request, but my friend was peculiar in

some respects, so I did as he desired and asked no questions. Accordingly, if there has been any foul play in the purloining of his papers, it was only a copy of the will that was stolen and not the original. I have that document in my own possession, and, young man, you are the sole heir to Benjamin Lawson's property, with the exception of three or four minor bequests to other individuals."

Ned was much astonished by this revelation, for he had imagined that no will would ever be found, and that, if he ever secured any portion of his friend's fortune, he would have to fight for it. But this disclosure smoothed all his difficulties, and he proposed that Mr. Marble should go with him to the Adams House and state to his grandfather what he had already told him.

The gentleman readily agreed to this, and set the next afternoon for the interview, as he said he wished to take the will along with him to prove his assertions.

At the appointed hour, he and Mr. Marble repaired to the hotel where Mr. Heatherton was stopping.

As they were shown into the old gentleman's private parlor, Ned caught sight of the flutter of a spotless white dress, as it vanished into another room, and wondered who the lady could be. He was sure it was not a servant, for the robe was too elaborate to be worn by a menial.

He introduced Mr. Marble to his grandfather, whereupon the lawyer at once stated the nature of his business and produced the will of Mr. Lawson, in corroboration of his assertions.

Thomas Heatherton was confounded by this unexpected piece of news, and at first utterly refused to believe it.

But when Mr. Marble produced the will, and he saw

Benjamin Lawson's signature, supported by those of two reliable witnesses both of whom were then living, in Boston, the lawyer said, he realized the solidity of the indisputable document.

He was utterly crushed by the revelation.

"I am ruined," he said, with a groan, as his head dropped heavily upon his breast, his whole air indicating despair.

"I hope, sir, you do not really mean just that," Mr. Marble courteously remarked.

"Yes, I do mean it—it is true," the old gentleman replied, dejectedly, "for I have recently been very unfortunate. I have lost all my own property and, at my time of life that is no light misfortune. I believe, however, that I should be provided for, as I suppose that the property of my late brother-in-law would fall to—to my son. But now every hope is crushed; I am a stricken old man, and life will be a burden to me."

Ned experienced deep pity for the old gentleman, for he really appeared to be utterly disheartened. He could hardly believe that he was the same person, who had seemed so hale and hearty and so proudly self-assured, when he had seen him upon the Nantasket steamer only the summer before.

"I regret very much if your circumstances are so straitened," Mr. Marble gravely responded. "But surely your son will come to your aid now and provide for your future. By the way, allow me to ask where Mr. Richard Heatherton is?—why is he not here to attend to this matter for himself?"

"He—has been called away on—on imperative business," faltered Mr. Heatherton, looking so utterly wretched that the hearts of both his visitors were touched; "but," he added, "I am authorized to act as his attorney during his absence."

"I suppose, in view of this," said Mr. Marble, tapping the will with his finger, "that you will now oppose no obstacles to the settlement of Mr. Lawson's property according to his wishes, as herein expressed?"

"No—no; of course, it would be useless for me to attempt to do so," was the dejected response. "I can only submit to the inevitable and sink into obscurity and insignificance. Oh, to think of a Heatherton coming to—that!" he concluded, in a most heart-rending tone, an expression of utter despair on his aged face.

But after a moment he made an effort to recover himself, and sitting erect, said, with sorrowful dignity:

"Pardon me, gentlemen, if I ask you to leave me alone in my misery, since there is no further need of prolonging this painful interview."

The two men could, of course, do nothing but bid him a courteous good-by, and take their departure; but Ned's kind heart was very heavy in view of the wretchedness which his own triumph had occasioned.

It was hard, indeed, he thought, for an old man to be so impoverished when the vigor of life was well-nigh spent, and there was so little time to rebuild his fallen fortunes.

And yet he could not quite understand how the mere loss of money could so utterly crush a person.

It had seemed to him that there was something rather strange in the excessive grief and distress of his grandfather as manifested that afternoon.

It might be that it was the combined loss of fortune and prestige added to the death of his wife, that had so stricken him, and yet, somehow, he was impressed that there was some more potent cause back of these. As they left the hotel, Mr. Marble informed Ned that he would immediately proceed to have the will of Mr.

Lawson probated, and then he could at once come into the possession of his inheritance.

They parted at the corner of Winter street, and Ned went directly home to relate to his mother the events of the day, and to tell her also that one of Mr. Lawson's bequests was the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, which was to be settled without restrictions upon herself.

Ned felt very grateful to his dear old friend for his great generosity; for it was a handsome fortune that had been willed to him, and he knew that his future now bade fair to be a very bright and happy one.

Still, as he and his mother talked it all over, and laid plans for the coming years, he frequently found his mind wandering to the unhappy old man, whom he had left "alone in his misery" that afternoon, and whose hopes had been crushed by his prosperity.

It seemed as if "coming events were really casting their shadows," for, singularly enough, while they were at dinner only a little later a servant entered the room, and handed a note to Ned. Opening it, he read:

MR. EDWARD HEATHERTON:

DEAR SIR: A relative of yours has been taken suddenly ill at the Adams House. He has expressed a desire to immediately see you and also your mother, Mrs. Heatherton. Can you make it convenient to come at once, as the case is considered urgent by the physician?

This was signed by the clerk of the hotel, and the servant said that the messenger, who had brought the note, was to wait for an answer, unless Mr. Heather-ton would return with him. Ned replied that he would go immediately, and the messenger need not wait.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MORE ASTOUNDING DEVELOPMENTS.

When Ned again entered the Adams House, accom-

panied by his mother, he was conducted at once to Mr. Heatherton's room.

They found him reclining upon his bed, looking very ill, while by his side sat a young girl, who was gently bathing his feverish brow.

Ned started, as he beheld her, for he instantly recognized Vera Heath—the lovely girl whom he had rescued from the blockade of vehicles on the corner of Boylston and Tremont streets, a few weeks previous.

"Miss Heath!" he exclaimed, in a low but surprised tone, as he took the chair which she indicated.

She bowed and flushed a vivid scarlet; then her eyes fell beneath his glance, and a look of perplexity flitted over her features. Ned turned to Mr. Heatherton.

"I am sorry to find you ill, sir," he said, in a gentle, respectful tone, "and, if there is anything that I can do for you, I am at your service."

A look of pain flashed into the eyes of the sufferer.

He did not reply directly to Ned's remark, but, turning to the girl by his side, he said:

"Vera, you are very tired; go and rest until I send for you again."

The maiden arose, and quietly left the room, while Ned and Mrs. Heatherton, watching her, wondered what she could be to the old man to whom she seemed to be so attentive.

When the door closed after her, Thomas Heatherton turned his glance again upon Ned, and remarked:

"You were good to come, though I did not merit it from you. I was taken very ill almost immediately after you left this afternoon, and something tells me that I have not long to live; indeed, I do not care to live—my heart is broken, my hope and courage are gone, and life henceforth holds no attraction for me."

Tears started to the gentle eyes of Mrs. Heatherton at this hopeless speech, and the old man, observing her emotion, flushed and continued, addressing her :

"I wonder that you can have the slightest feeling for me, Miriam Heatherton! I know that I deserve only your scorn and indifference, and it moves me deeply—melts my proud heart, if you can believe it, to see tears in your eyes for me."

He paused a moment as if to collect his thoughts, then resumed, as he turned again to Ned :

"I have sent for you to entreat that you will perform a solemn duty for me. You saw the child who just left me—do you know who she is?"

"I know her only as Miss Vera Heath—I met her a few weeks ago——" Ned began, when Mr. Heatherton interrupted him.

"I know about that," he said, "she told me of the adventure. But Vera Heath, as you call her, is Vera Heatherton, and—your half-sister."

Ned and his mother exchanged looks of undisguised amazement at this revelation.

Then Miriam flushed to the waves of bright brown hair lying so lightly on her brow, as she comprehended the situation.

She well knew that Ned could have no "half sister"—at least, none who could have any legal claim upon him as such; but it struck her as a singular and significant coincidence that Richard Heatherton—the man who had so deliberately planned to wrong her—should have an acknowledged daughter, whose position must be just what, for years she had believed, Ned's to be—that of a nameless child.

"Can that be possible!" Ned said, gravely, as soon as he could recover himself sufficiently to speak.

"It is the truth," said the sick man, with a sigh, and then he proceeded to relate the story of Vera's life, as we already know it.

Both Ned and his mother were deeply interested, but they were also saddened by the pathetic tale, and the blight which they knew must always rest upon the fair young girl through no fault of hers.

"The child has been left in my care," Mr. Heatherton said in conclusion, while an expression of keen pain swept over his face, "and it was more on her account than my own that I was so crushed by the loss of Benjamin Lawson's property."

"But where is—her father?" Ned inquired.

He could not understand why these two should have been left alone at such a critical time.

Thomas Heatherton darted a startled look at the young man.

"Why do you ask me such a question? Do you not know where he is?" he demanded, sharply, and with a deep indrawn breath of agony.

"No—how should I know? I have never seen the man," Ned replied, with a bewildered expression.

"You have never seen Richard Heatherton!" ejaculated the sick man, regarding him incredulously.

"No—at least, not to know him."

"Then I must tell you; but will you keep the secret from the world?—will you promise never to tell Vera?"

"I will be guided entirely by your wishes in this matter," Ned gravely returned.

"Her father—my son—oh, shame! that I live to say it!" cried the man, white to his lips with mortification and anguish of mind, "Vera's father occupies a—felon's cell."

"What!" exclaimed both Ned and his mother in one astonished breath.

"It is strange that you do not know—that you have not suspected the truth," said the old man, wonderingly; "but Richard Heatherton and Albert Gould, the bank robber, are one and the same person."

"Heavens, can this be true!" cried Ned, starting almost wildly to his feet, as he realized all that this revelation involved.

Albert Gould, the man who had been tried and condemned for a stupendous robbery—who had drugged and robbed him on the train coming from Albany—who had lured him on board the *Bald Eagle*, where he had deliberately drugged him again, to get the keys with which to carry out his vile schemes and enrich himself at the expense of his son's honor—his father!

More than this, the man must have known the truth from the first, and had heartlessly plotted his ruin. It did not seem possible that any human being could be so lost to every principle of true manhood and paternal sentiment.

"Heavens!" Ned cried again, as he paced the floor in great excitement, "it is too dreadful to think of. Was not the measure of his wickedness full enough before, without thus violating every kindred tie and deliberately planning the ruin of his own flesh and blood? Gould—that cunning thief—that dastardly villain—my father! No, I never dreamed of such a thing!"

"It is true," groaned the sick man, "and to be the father of such a man is a curse too heavy to be borne."

Ned thought so, too, and a feeling of deep compassion for the wretched man took possession of his heart; while the excessive misery which he had betrayed earlier in the day, and which had so puzzled him was now explained.

He now recalled some circumstances which had seemed very strange at the trial of Albert Gould.

When he had been asked to state his name, he had grown as white as a sheet, and hesitated before replying. "Albert Gould!" he had said, but with a peculiar inflection which had attracted the instant attention of both judge and counsel.

The counsel had pronounced it after him, then asked: "Is that your real name?"

"Yes, my name is Albert Gould," reiterated the prisoner, speaking more firmly and lifting a half defiant glance to the lawyer.

There was no one present to gainsay his statement, and the name was so recorded. Ned had never known him by any other name. His mother—who could have identified him—was not present at the trial, and no one else there appeared to have any knowledge of the man's previous history to controvert his assertion.

"When my son was arrested," Mr. Heatherton resumed, "he sent for me to come to him, and told me that he should never appear as a felon under his own name. He charged me not to show myself in court during his trial, nor allow Vera to suspect the truth. She was to be told that he had gone away on a long journey, during which she was to be left in my charge, and, by and by, I was to tell her that he was dead. The change in her name from Heath to Heatherton I was to explain as best I could; but she must never learn that her father was a condemned criminal. I swore that I would do his bidding, and thus, to all intents and purposes, Richard Heatherton has gone out of the world, and this beautiful girl is worse than an orphan. He charged me also to make every effort to secure Benjamin Lawson's property, so that Vera might not be left destitute. I was to be her guardian until her marriage and receive a comfortable income for my services as such. But, of course, the will has overthrown all

this. The anxiety, the disappointment, and mental suffering which I have had to bear during the last few weeks have sapped my life and my energies and I feel sure that I have not long to live. Now, Edward Heatherton, I ask—and you can readily see how my pride has fallen to bring me to this—will you assume the care of your sister?—will you give me your promise that you will never allow her to want?—for, aside from me, she has not a friend in the world. She is a gentle, lovable creature, and as keenly sensitive as she is beautiful. Oh! I hope her life may not be ruined by the sins of her father,” the man plaintively concluded.

Ned did not reply for several minutes, but sat, with averted eyes and a very thoughtful face, reviewing all the past. He recalled all his mother's sorrows—all the wrong and neglect which she had suffered at the hands of this man's son; all the struggles of the long years—before he was old enough to help her—which had so nearly “sapped her life and energies;” all the heartlessness which had so nearly wrecked his own life and honor, and defrauded him of his inheritance.

All this was summed up and stood out boldly against the cause of Vera, which had been laid before him.

But, on the other hand, he told himself that the girl was in no way responsible for the sins of her father. She had never entertained a thought of wrong toward him or his mother. It was her misfortune, rather than her fault, that she was the child of such a man, while her gentleness and purity of character would be admitted by any one who looked into her face.

How lovely she had seemed to him, that bright June day when, flushed and heated after the excitement and danger from which he had rescued her, she had looked gratefully up into his eyes, and sweetly thanked him

for what he had done. He had thought her next to Gertrude; the prettiest girl that he had ever seen, and yet he never dreamed she could be anything to him.

But she was his sister! Yes, even though she had no legal right to bear his name, the same blood was flowing in their veins—there was a kindred tie that could not be ignored.

Something like a thrill of gladness shot through him at the thought; then he suddenly remembered that he could never claim this kindred tie without violating Mr. Heatherton's wishes and bringing sadness upon her life.

"How do you wish me to care for her?" Ned inquired, at this point. "You do not wish her to know the truth—you do not wish me to claim her as a sister."

Thomas Heatherton turned restlessly upon his pillow.

"Oh, I don't know what to tell you!" he groaned. "I realize the difficulties of which you are thinking. I am afraid that she must learn the truth regarding her birth if you assume the care of her, and yet I long to spare her the sorrow—the shame. Oh, I will—I must leave it all with you to do as your judgment directs," he concluded, helplessly.

The light of a noble resolve came into Ned's face.

"I will do as you wish," he quietly remarked, "and I submit this proposal to you. Benjamin Lawson has left me a large fortune—more than I need, for I am a man, and have a desire to do something for myself in the world. I will settle a certain sum upon Vera—enough to supply her with every comfort. She need never know that it comes from me—let her believe that she inherits it from her father, if you choose—you can appoint some competent person to act as her guardian, if you are unable to assume such duties, and thus she will be shielded in the future from the shame of any

painful revelations. How will such an arrangement suit you?"

A feeling of deep humiliation—of contempt for himself and his arrogance—of shame for his treatment of Miriam—of repulsion for his selfishness and avarice, surged over the proud soul of Thomas Heatherton, as he at last fully realized the true nobility of the young man whom he had so despised and ignored, and the grand character of the woman who had reared him with such principles.

Such manliness, such honor, and unselfishness shamed him as he had never before been shamed; and, weakened by pain and long continued anxiety, by sleepless nights and wretched days, he broke down utterly, and began to sob like a child.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Ned was greatly distressed, for it was very hard, to see a proud, man weep with such abandonment.

"I hope I have not said anything to wound you, sir," he exclaimed, appealingly.

"No—no; but, my boy you have conquered my hard old heart at last," he tremulously returned. "I've known, from the first time I met you, that you were made of grander stuff than the Heathertons ever possessed, for they have all been haughty and purse-proud, unless it was my dear wife; I can say no more to show you how I honor you. As for Vera, I would like her to be surrounded by love and sympathy, and something tells me that she would be happier with you and your mother if—if you could consent to have her in your home. But I leave everything to your judgment. I

have explained to her that her name is Heatherton, and she imagines that her father dropped the latter part of it because of some quarrel with me. Doubtless she will surmise that you are relatives, and you can tell her whatever you think best. And now," turning to Miriam with an appealing glance, "dare I ask you to pardon my past rudeness to you? I am appalled when I recall it."

"Pray do not make so much of it," Miriam interposed, with fast-dropping tears, for it was sad, indeed, to witness the proud man's deep humiliation, to realize how heart-broken he was over his only son's crimes, his grand-daughter's shame, and his own poverty; "and let me assure you," she added, "that both Ned and I will do all in our power to shield Miss Vera from sorrow or want."

He thanked her humbly, and then, the physician coming in, they arose to go, for he seemed very weary, but they promised to come again the next day to confer further with him.

Vera came to them in the parlor, just as they were going out, and thanked them for responding so promptly to the message which had been sent to them.

Mrs. Heatherton's heart went immediately out to the motherless and almost friendless girl, and she felt impelled to take her directly home, in spite of the fact she was the child of the man who had so wronged her.

That night Mr. Heatherton experienced an unfavorable change, and wandered in his mind until morning.

Vera refused to leave him, and sat by his side for many long hours, while she learned from his rambling talk that there were dark secrets connected with her own and her father's lives of which she had never had a suspicion.

"Don't tell Vera," was the burden of the old man's

cry; "she must never know; it would break her heart."

"Don't tell Vera what?" she questioned, feeling as if all her strength was leaving her, and she seemed suddenly congealed to ice as the reply came back.

"That she isn't really a Heatherton after all, and be sure she never suspects the awful truth about Dick."

That was enough to tell her that there was some mystery about her birth, and that something dreadful had happened to her father, and she knew that she never could rest until it was all explained to her.

He was a little better the next day, and continued to improve for a week; but his physician said that he would never be well again, and advised his removal from the hotel to some more home-like place.

"What shall we do, mother?" Ned asked, when he had told her what the doctor said. "Neither of them has any friends, and, I fear, but very little money."

"Whatever you think best, Ned. I—I do not feel right to be using Mr. Lawson's money for ourselves, when his sister's husband and grandchild are in need," Miriam gravely responded.

"That is just my feeling," the noble fellow returned. "Shall we bring them home and care for them here? Would it be disagreeable to you to have Vera with us?"

"No; she is a sweet girl, Ned, and I think I could love her very dearly for herself," his mother answered.

He leaned forward, and kissed her on the lips.

"You blessed woman!" he fondly murmured. "I'm sure there will be a crown of gold for you somewhere."

And thus Thomas Heatherton and Vera went to Mount Vernon street to live, where the young girl devoted herself entirely to the feeble old man during the few remaining weeks of his life.

He did not suffer much pain, but he grew very help-

less and childish, and clung to Ned with the most touching fondness and confidence.

When at last he passed away both Ned and his mother felt very glad that they had done everything within their power to make him comfortable during those last days of his feebleness and necessity.

After their return from New York, where they went to lay him beside his wife, Vera sought Ned with a very grave but determined face.

"Mr. Heatherton," she said, lifting her clear, searching eyes to his, "while grandpapa was ill and wandering he betrayed that there is some secret connected with my life and my father's absence. I did not like to trouble him when he was ill, so I have waited until now to ask what he meant, and—and, please, I want you to tell me all about it."

Ned was both astonished and dismayed, and tried his best to evade her questions.

But she was quietly firm and persistent.

"You cannot tell me that there is nothing that you are withholding from me, can you?" she asked.

Ned could not deny this, and finally confessed that Mr. Heatherton had confided a secret to him which he was unwilling she should know.

"Then tell me," she commanded, authoritatively. "I will know."

And he was forced to obey her, but he revealed the truth regarding her birth so gently and tenderly, and making her realize how dear she was becoming to him as a sister, that much of the sting was taken out of the bitter truth.

But a harder trial was in store for him, for when the matter was all explained he was abruptly asked:

"And now tell me where is my father?"

"What did Mr. Heatherton tell you regarding him?" Ned inquired, to gain time.

"That he has gone on a long journey; is that the truth? If so, where, and why?"

"Do not ask me; I cannot tell you," Ned said, firmly, but deeply troubled.

"But I must know. I shall be unhappy all my life if I have to live in suspense," Vera cried, a sharp agony in her voice. "I know—I feel that there is something dreadful about it. It is very strange that papa should go away when we needed him so much and you must tell me."

Still Ned demurred; he could not bring himself to reveal that the man whom she so trusted and loved was occupying a felon's cell.

But she was determined, and finally, seeing that he must do something, he said he would think of the matter for a day or two, and then she must be content to abide by his decision.

The next morning he went directly to the Charlestown prison, where he had an interview with Richard Heatherton, told him the whole story, and asked what he should do.

He was shocked by the man's appearance.

He seemed to have aged twenty years, and it was evident that he was breaking down beneath his load of shame and his confinement.

It was an added blow to him, too, to learn that Vera suspected something wrong, and insisted upon knowing the truth.

"You will have to tell her," he finally said, his white lips trembling with the agony within him. "Then," he added, with his clinched hands pressed close over

his heart, "bring her here afterward, for I must see her if only for once—just once."

So Ned went home, but with a heavy heart and broke the truth as gently as he could to the anxious girl.

It was a terrible experience for one so sensitive. She was shocked to the soul, and stood for one moment regarding Ned in a dazed way, then dropped like lead to the floor.

But when she recovered consciousness she astonished them all by her wonderful calmness, and demanded to be taken at once to her father.

They had to wait a little, however, as the law allows only one visit to each prisoner within a specified time; but the day came at last, and the two were allowed to meet. No one ever knew what passed between them, but when they parted the beautiful girl seemed like a woman of twenty-five, whose life had known some blighting sorrow, while the wretched father watched her go out of his presence with a look of longing and despair on his white face that Ned never forgot.

Two days later, when the turnkey unlocked the door of the man's cell, he found him lying on the floor dead.

A letter which he had committed to Vera, to be given to Ned, confessed, among other things, that it was he who had entered Benjamin Lawson's house during his absence, blown open and rifled the safe, and stolen the copy of his will, which he had destroyed, believing it to be the only document of the kind in existence.

Thus the petted and pampered child of fortune, the fast young man at college, who had boasted of the "wild oats" he had sown, reaped, in the end, only a harvest of shame, dishonor, and a suicide's death.

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Late in the fall the Langmaids returned from

Europe, and no one rejoiced more over Ned's victory and complete vindication than these friends of his youth. Mrs. Langmaid's health was fully restored, the house on Arlington street was reopened, and Gertrude returned to Boston once more.

Of course there was now no reason why Mr. Langmaid should object to a formal engagement between Ned and his daughter, and as he felt that he was in a position to warrant the step, the young lover pleaded that an early day might be set for their marriage.

Mr. Langmaid consented, and the ceremony was announced to occur on the fifteenth of January.

It was a brilliant affair. The marriage was solemnized in King's Chapel, and followed by an elaborate reception at Mr. Langmaid's residence.

Ned had had the house on Mount Vernon street re-decorated and refurnished, and made ready for his bride, when they should return from a trip of three months to Europe—the officials of the bank having given Ned that length of time, out of gratitude for what he had done toward restoring the stolen treasure. While, upon their return, Mrs. Edward Heatherton found awaiting her a gift from the same source of a handsome coupe and a pair of beautiful bay horses.

Vera and Mrs. Heatherton lived quietly in the house on Mount Vernon street during their absence, and the young girl and her father's injured wife became very strongly attached to each other, while Miriam did everything in her power to dispel the sadness which had hung like a cloud over the poor child ever since she learned the facts regarding her history and her father's crimes.

Her efforts were not fruitless, for, gradually, she became more cheerful, and, though she never again would

be as light-hearted as she had been on that day when Ned first saw her, Miriam felt assured that in time she would become a happy and useful woman.

This belief was verified when, three years later, she married a promising young man—the eldest son of Mr. Cranston the cashier of the —— Bank who was also working his way up in that institution as Ned had done before him.

Ned settled a handsome dowry upon the charming bride whom he had grown to regard with all the fondness of a brother; while Vera was often heard to assert that “a nobler fellow did not live than her Ned.”

“You are a prince of royal blood,” she said to him on the morning of her bridal, when he put his deed of gift into her hands as a wedding present, “for you are akin to the king whose name is—‘Love.’”

The Bald Eagle which had been one of the extravagances that had sapped the fortune of Vera’s mother was sold, and when Richard Heatherton’s debts were paid there was still a little left to be added to the young bride’s dowry.

Mr. Hunting, after recovering possession of his valuable invention, settled in Boston, where with Ned’s and Mr. Langmaid’s assistance he succeeded in getting it on the market where it was soon pronounced to be a grand achievement and eventually yielded its inventor a handsome competence.

Three children in time came to add joy to Ned’s already happy home—two sturdy boys “Lawson” and a “Ned Junior” and a lovely girl who was named for “Aunt Vera.” Miriam Heatherton believed them to be the most wonderful children the world contained, while she often marveled over the rare happiness and sweet content that were crowning her later life in the charm-

ing and peaceful household of her son by whom, as each year wove the silver threads more thickly among her bright-brown hair, she became more tenderly beloved and revered.

"Papa," said Lawson Heatherton—Ned's eldest boy of ten—one day while the family were at dinner, "what are 'wild oats?'"

"Wild oats!" his father repeated while he regarded his son with unusual gravity.

"Yes; I heard some one of the Harvard boys out at the ball ground to-day talking about somebody who had been 'sowing wild oats' and then they all laughed as if it was very funny," the boy explained.

"Well, Lawson," said Ned impressively, "the wild oats of which they were talking were doubtless acts of disobedience and lawlessness and excesses of various kinds which if persisted in must eventually lead to sin, shame and dishonor. If you should live to go to college, my boy, or wherever you may be, never think it smart to sow 'wild oats'—so-called—for they will only bring you a harvest of sorrow and remorse."

"Did you ever sow any, papa?" questioned the boy, studying his father's unusually grave face and speaking with something of apprehension in his tones.

Ned smiled reassuringly, for he read the child's fear in his clear expressive eyes; but before he could reply, Miriam Heatherton answered for him.

"No dear, he never did," she said, a tender smile wreathing his sweet eyes, "and your father's harvest bids fair to be abundant sheaves of rich and golden grain. Try to be like him, dear boy, and you will be a noble and useful, as well as a happy man."

(THE END.)

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In point of publication, "Darnley" is that work by Mr. James which follows "Richelieu," and, if rumor can be credited, it was owing to the advice and insistence of our own Washington Irving that we are indebted primarily for the story, the young author questioning whether he could properly paint the difference in the characters of the two great cardinals. And it is not surprising that James should have hesitated; he had been eminently successful in giving to the world the portrait of Richelieu as a man, and by attempting a similar task with Wolsey as the theme, was much like tempting fortune. Irving insisted that "Darnley" came naturally in sequence, and this opinion being supported by Sir Walter Scott, the author set about the work.

As a historical romance "Darnley" is a book that can be taken up pleasurably again and again, for there is about it that subtle charm which those who are strangers to the works of G. P. R. James have claimed was only to be imparted by Dumas.

If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

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Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

By no means least among the charms of the story are the vivid word-pictures of the thrilling adventures, and the intense paintings of the beauties of nature, as seen in the almost unbroken forests.

It is the spirit of the frontier which is described, and one can by it, perhaps, the better understand why men, and women, too, willingly braved every privation and danger that the westward progress of the star of empire might be the more certain and rapid. A love story, simple and tender, runs through the book.

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